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# A HUMAN DOCUMENT

VOL. III.



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A Nobel

BY

W. H. MALLOCK

*IN THREE VOLUMES*

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## A HUMAN DOCUMENT.

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### CHAPTER XXIV.

Two days later Grenville's diary ran thus—  
“She is gone, and I am left solitary. For a week longer I am obliged to remain in London, to complete the sale of my property; and I shall then follow her. As for my property, the bitterness of death is past. Not yet legally, but still, so far as I am concerned, finally, that matter is settled. My family is come to an end. It has no home and no future. The place is to be bought as it stands—pictures, furniture and all. I have been allowed to reserve nothing but the portraits of my mother and my sister, and a few miniatures. The ostensible purchaser is not the

real purchaser ; and who the latter is I do not know, and why should I care ? The terms are such as will enable me to live without begging. My lawyer tells me I am getting a fancy price. So be it. I have chosen my lot in life, but as yet I am not used to it. At present I feel like a man who has lost his teeth, and whose mouth is still strange to him ; or like a man whose leg has been amputated, and who still feels it aching. There is a gap, there is an aching, everywhere.

“ If Lady Ashford could read this diary, which was begun at her suggestion, what a triumph it would be to her ! I could bear her laughing at me. I could bear to confess to her that she was right, and that I have found my fate as she said I should. And yet once or twice, though I hardly like to put it in writing, this doubt has occurred to me — I have asked myself whether one fine morning I shall not wake up and find that all this conduct of mine has been that of a drunken man who has half undressed himself in the street, and made himself for ever a laughing-

stock to himself and his friends also. Yes—I have asked myself this; but the answer is instant and unvarying — that I am not like such a drunken man, but that I see and think clearly; and that the treasure which I am now deliberately choosing is for me as a human soul, worth more than anything which I give up for it. A week ago, though I should have said the same thing, I might not perhaps have been able to say it with so much courage. Then I was being torn by doubts, and was almost mad with anxiety; but these few days by the sea have set all my doubts to rest. Distance may sometimes separate us, but bitterness or doubt, never.

“No—in choosing my lot I am not drunk. Unlike the lover, to whom love is a foolish intoxication, it has not even robbed me of my ordinary cool prudence, or even rendered me selfish. For those few persons who depend on me, I have taken care that all due provision shall be made. As for myself, I shall, when my poor aunt dies, be rather better off than I have been; and I shall for the present be a

little, but not much poorer. I shall make up for that by leaving these rooms next autumn, and taking some that are cheaper. Six weeks ago, my prospects were somewhat different. I had then before me visions of big houses, and servants, and all the life that goes with them. Yes—yes—I know quite well what I am losing. No miser, unwillingly counting over his coins as he pays them, knows better.

“Let that go. But, Irma, now I must turn to you, and confess to you, who have been so guilelessly truthful to me, about another trouble which I still have to reckon with, but which I can reckon with better than I could a week ago. I am sad without you; but my complete trust in you gives to this sadness a sort of cloistral quiet, in which I continually think our situation over. I fancy, as I do this, that I consist of four persons—myself as jury, myself as prisoner, and two counsel, who are respectively prosecuting and defending me. The one attacks me as depraved, mean, and wicked; the other takes up every point in order, considers it curiously and fairly, and



disposes of it. The attacking party—the counsel for the prosecution—is extremely furious and voluble; and there are two qualities in his rhetoric that at first intimidated me. He laid down all his propositions as if no one could question them; and no doubt they were all of them propositions I had heard before. He said, ‘You are ruining the happiness of a home; you are betraying a friend; you are wronging a man who has trusted you, and who has never injured you.’ And he went on in this way till he was out of breath. He had no need to think, for his phrases were supplied him by newspapers. Then the other began, taking every point in order. ‘Ruining the happiness of a home!’ he exclaimed. ‘What does that mean? The home in question had none of that happiness which the conduct now in question could ruin. Weak indeed must be the case of a prosecution, when one of its most formidable arguments rests upon something which is, in this case, a mere conventional fiction—some Richard Roe or some John Doe of morality. If the happiness of a home has

been here affected in any way, it has been rather repaired than ruined. Betraying a friend !' the counsel for the defence continues. ' Here is another fiction—not a fiction in some cases, but a fiction here ; and yet always assumed conventionally, whether true or not.' And then the counsel says, turning to me in my capacity of jury—' The arguments we have just been listening to pretend to be those of the conscience. They illustrate a fact I have very often suspected, namely, that much which passes for conscience, or a man's own inmost voice, is not what it seems to be. It is not what he says about himself—he who knows all the circumstances ; but what he thinks other people would say, who could never know but a part of them, and that part the least important. It is not the voice of your own judgment on yourself, but your hypothetical anticipation of how other people would misjudge you.' In many cases I am convinced that this is absolutely true. The counsel for the prosecution is more furious than ever. He drops the tone of argument, adopts that of

a sermon, and quotes various phrases which either have no meaning, or derive it from an assumption that the text of the New Testament is inspired. Instantly the other one interrupts him. 'Stop,' he says, 'for a moment. Recollect yourself, and be consistent. What is your attitude towards dogmatic Christianity? Do you believe that directly or indirectly the words of the New Testament come from some miraculous source? Will you stake your moral existence on the truth of the Nicene Creed, of the doctrine of verbal inspiration, of the infallible and supernatural authority of patristic and other traditions? Not you. Rightly or wrongly you assent to the scientific methods of the age; and none of these doctrines for you are more than facts of history. How do you dare then—is this your spiritual honesty—to bully me with texts and opinions whose authority you yourself deny? The fear which you seek to raise in me, and which if you could raise it you would attribute to conscience, would indeed be fear exactly as described by Solomon—it would be a *betrayal*

*of the succours that reason offereth.*' At this point matters take a new turn. The prosecutor shifts his ground, and goes back to reason. 'Suppose,' he says, 'I admit your arguments to be right in your own case, that your own personal conscience has not full grounds for condemning you, yet what would be the result were this to be admitted generally? Every one would apply this admission to himself, to justify any caprice however depraved or wanton. He could persuade himself that it applied to his circumstances just as well as to yours.' 'My friend,' the other answers, 'all that you say sounds admirable, till you come to examine the sense of it. The sense of what you just have urged, if it has any sense, is this:—that we must submit to conscience in cases where we know it to be wrong, for fear that others should not submit to it in cases where it would be right.'

"And so they go on—these arguing voices within me: and I listen to them with an interest in their general bearing which sometimes makes me forget that they have any

reference to myself. And then when I remember that they have, and it all again becomes personal, do you know what I am tempted to do? I am so inconsistent that I am sometimes tempted to ask whether my real conscience must not be dead in me—whether I have not lost my perception of right and wrong; if I am able really to doubt as to so grave a matter? And then I try the whole case over again. I lay bare my passion to my conscience, and I ask, does it degrade or raise me? And out of the depths of my conscience, or my consciousness, comes always the same answer. There is a passion that degrades, and there is a passion that raises. Mine is the passion that raises. How do I know that? By a very simple test—I know it by its fruits. And what may its fruits be? They are these. It has ‘created a soul under the ribs of death.’ It has taught me to value the true treasure of life, not the glittering husk. It has quickened my feeling for all other human beings. It is killing selfishness. It has given to fidelity a meaning I never before conceived. It has

made fidelity a part not only of every action, but of every thought. It has nerved me not only for great sacrifices, which once made are made for ever, but for all those self-restraints and self-denials for which occasion is always arising, and in which the larger sacrifices are repeated, as on an altar, daily. It has shown me that the truest pleasures of life are the simplest and also the purest. It has given wings to the flesh, which have fanned themselves into the world of the spirit. It has touched corruption, and corruption has put on incorruption. If any one would understand natural religion, let him understand a natural love like mine. This is that hidden well to which all the pleasures and virtues and faiths and aspirations 'repairing, in their golden urns draw light.' It contains everything that can make us value life, and regret yet be resigned to death."

So wrote Grenville on the day of Mrs. Schilizzi's departure. That evening he went out to a party, not because he was inclined for society, but because he feared solitude. When



he came back to his room his brow was clouded, and again turning to his diary, and bending sadly over the pages, he proceeded thus :—

“On many occasions, but more especially when I have been a passenger on some great ocean steamer, and have watched the beauty of its lines as it sheared the waves, or answered like a living thing to the helm, or when I have looked down, as I often have done, into the engine-room, and seen the ceaseless sliding flash of the huge machinery—the measured reeling of those towers of steel, the cylinders—the rise and fall of the burnished piston-rods—the sway of the returning cranks—rising and falling, turning and returning, all fulfilling faithfully their appointed courses, I have been lost in wonder at the perfect skill of man. I have said over to myself the lines of Sophocles—

‘ Full many things are wonderful, but none  
More fearful and more wonderful than man.’

And then I have thought of man, as we all know him, imperfect ; and again and again I have said this to myself—What men make is

so much better than what they do ; what they do is so much worse than what they are.

“To-night I have felt this last remark to be bitterly true as to myself. In these pages, but an hour or two ago, I was writing about the fidelity which went through all my acts and thoughts. And now to-night—what wayward devil was in me?—miserable as I was, smarting as I was with the sense of *her* absence, I have allowed myself to take some sort of alien pleasure in the eyes of other women. Each time it was for a moment only. It was a poor little starved emotion, which I stamped upon every moment it showed itself. And yet, if she knew of this I should be ashamed. And mentally, amongst all those people, I kept saying to her, ‘Irma, forgive me; I am yours, and yours only.’ I won’t write more about these misdeeds. Never till now would they have seemed to me misdeeds at all. What to you, Irma, seems an infidelity I should have looked on as fidelity to any other woman.

“This occurs to me. Suppose in this diary I were to be absolutely unreserved, telling



all my minutest faults, even to those of each thwarted impulse, not only would another reading it think me worse than I am, but I should probably myself think so. We should both of us probably think that I was vainglorious in describing my virtues, whilst the more candid I was in confessing my sins that the more sins we both should think remained behind, being too shameful for confession. If one man, or only a few men, are candid in this way, they are certain to be misjudged thus. They will seem to be worse than others, only because they are more honest. And yet if only a few men would with absolute truth give us some record of the workings of their consciences, what advances in knowledge might be made !

“Irma—you will never see what I am writing. These words will never reach you ; but before I go to bed let me solemnly swear this to you—that if you could see the whole of my heart and soul, these sins which, small as they are, I repent so bitterly, would not destroy your faith in me, or make you think

me less wholly yours. All my life turns to you. All my life depends on you."

Mrs. Schilizzi's plans were to go at once to the Princess and bring the children back again to the hotel in the forest; and there, as soon as he could do so, Grenville was to rejoin her. It would be a day or two, therefore, before he could count on hearing from her; and yet even on the second, though he knew she would be spending it in the train, he fondly hoped that she might manage to despatch a line to him. He knew that under the same circumstances he would do so to her. But no line came. The disappointment could not be said to have taken away the sunlight from him; but, for all that, it did take away the sunshine. He went mechanically about his melancholy legal business. He dined out as if he had been dining in a dream, and he knew no happiness till weary he went to bed, hoping that sleep would hurry him to a letter from her next morning. There was one. It was written hastily; most of it was mere fragmentary news, but there

was a phrase or two and a sentence that breathed affection, filling him with a sense of it like a box of spikenard broken. That day was a happy one, except for one discovery which it brought to him—that his business would keep him in London for ten days instead of for a week; but this was again counterbalanced by his news from Mrs. Schilizzi. Her husband, she had just heard in Vienna, would be later in returning than he anticipated; so they would at all events have time to set their house in order.

That day was a happy one, but the next was a total blank. There was not so much as a line from her. Then came a weary third. Again there was no letter. He had written every day, pouring out to her every thought of his heart. He had hardly been able to bring himself to close his envelopes, and cease sending his voice to her. Like Dante's souls in purgatory, up till now he had been "contented in the flame," but this third day's silence was more than his nerves could bear. No one watching him, no one

talking to him, as he went through his business, and dined out, would have guessed from his acuteness in the one case and his flow of conversation in the other that a tooth sharper than the serpent's was gnawing him under his shirt and waistcoat. A week went by before he had heart to continue his diary, and when he did so his record of that week was as follows :—

“Of all physical maladies perhaps the most acute is sea-sickness, and yet none receives so little pity. With regard to the pains of the soul, the heart, the spirit—the devil knows what to call it—I am beginning to see that the same thing holds good. Some of the most pitiable are those that would be least pitied. I think this week I have been almost mad sometimes, and even now my temper gets into my pen, and I talk of the devil before I know what I am doing. I am a fool—a fool ; and yet I am not a coward, for to all the world I have shown an unruffled front. But—fool I must be ; for what is the cause of my wretchedness ? Merely that

a woman in ten days has written only three times to me, and one of these times only three careless lines. What a trifling calamity that sounds to one who reads of it! but to me who feel it—what has it meant to me? Here is a woman for whose sake I am renouncing everything. I am remaining in London for no other reason than to complete the death of my ambition, and the act that will make me homeless. And through every hour of the day her image has haunted me. Every thought I have thought I have mentally brought to her, as some Catholic votarist lays flowers upon an altar. The one occupation that has given me any real comfort has been to write to her. All my hours of exertion have been like steps to the hour which was dedicated to this writing. And each day all my hopes naturally were to hear from her. I have been accustomed to reason with myself from my own experience; and knowing how to write to her is for me a daily necessity—how every day I am straitened till this is accomplished, I could not but

conclude that unless her affection were decreasing, to write to me would be an equal necessity for her.

“Two of her letters have been almost worse than none—evidences of carelessness far more than of care. I was patient at first, though disappointed; but at last the gathering pain burst out in my mind like a fountain of bitter water. Much as I long to be honest, I cannot for very shame’s sake commit to paper all the things I have said about her; and I cannot, for another reason—because no words could express it—commit to paper the misery in which I said them. But the kind of judgment which, in these moods, I have passed upon her, I can describe in general terms. Just as her connection with myself has been ennobled and sanctified in my eyes by my believing it, as I have done, to be the result of a serious passion, so the moment I was tempted to consider that passion a caprice, not even strong enough to have the semblance of unselfishness, her whole conduct and character have entirely changed their aspect.



My devotion to her has turned into a sort of surprised contempt, to be equalled only by my own contempt for myself.

“Stay, stay. It will be perhaps as well if I do actually record one or two specimens of my accusations against her. I have said, ‘Here am I, who am giving up all my life to her: and she will not sacrifice for me even five minutes out of the day.’ I have said also, ‘And does she feel it a sacrifice to write to me? If she does, by feeling so she shows the sacrifice to be worthless.’ Again I have imagined myself saying this to her—‘The things you value in life, you value in this order—first your children, then your clothes, then your comfort—and after your comfort you have fancied you valued me.’

“And day by day, whilst she was forcing me to think like this of her, I was completing for her sake the surrender of all my worldly prospects. Had I been forced to be solitary, I think I should have gone mad. I have been constantly mixing in society by way of a counter-irritant; and the kindness I have

met in the world has seemed such a strange thing to me, when compared with her cruelty, for whom I am giving the world up. A few nights ago, at a concert, whom should I meet but Lady Evelyn Standish ! Was she different, or was I different, from what I or she was at Vicenza ? It seemed to me that there was a deeper welcome in her eyes. She took evident pleasure in being with me. She contrived to dismiss civilly every one who attempted to interrupt us ; and I remained at her side, talking to her all the evening. And I thought, ‘I am giving you up for that hard, thankless woman !’ And yet, all that evening, not for a single moment did I let voice or look convey any thought or feeling which was more than what a friend might have conveyed, or by which that hard, thankless woman would have been wronged.

“Were my mood as I write this the mood I have been just describing, I should never have had the heart to make so miserable a confession. But I have as yet told only half my story. I have said that I—I myself—



have been accusing her. It was not I, but some pack of rebellious voices in me—wolves of the spirit, which in lacerating her, lacerated me first. As for me—as for my real self—I was ashamed that the purlieus of my mind should harbour such beasts of prey; and day by day I fought with them, beating them down, and striking them into silence. How quickly they sprang up again! Again I struck them down.

“I strengthened myself for this struggle in three ways—first, by thinking how unworthy it was of me, as a man, to allow myself to be so savagely disturbed by anything; secondly, by thinking how, even were the worst I could impute to her true, there was still in her a goodness and a tenderness, as to which I could not have been deceived, and how, if she needed forgiveness, I should find peace in forgiving her; and lastly, by making myself the advocate of her cause, and seeing how much might be said that would altogether justify her. I urged on my own attention how far harder, for many reasons, it probably

was for her to write than for me. I argued that the shortness of her letters might be a sign of trust in me, rather than of indifference, showing her to believe that even in a few hasty words I should see the affection whose existence she never dreamed of my doubting. I said to myself again, that under certain circumstances, an affection sure of itself, and sure of the desired return, felt the need of writing less than an affection less deep and trusting; and I also reminded myself of a fact of my own experience—that once or twice, though all day I had been writing letters to her mentally, the actual composition of one had been an effort even to myself.

“In this way I have reduced my mind to order, though I am still smarting after the conflict. Irma, I feel that I owe you so much more than a man owes a woman, under other and more fortunate conditions. I want to subdue pride, and selfishness, and evil temper. I want to offer to you all this self-conquest, though you never know what it has cost me, or reward me by any recognition of it. And

yet how easy you might make it, would you only treat me with a kindness which surely would cost you nothing! Of these three last letters you have written me, the last has been really kind, short as it was. Your image, which had almost vanished from me, or become distorted, came close to me and was clear again. The strife in my heart was hushed. The bitter waters became sweet."

A little later he added this:—"Even if at times I pass out of her mind, and she is not conscious that she feels I am of much value to her, it does not follow that she really is shallow and inconstant. What seems indifference is often merely security; just as rich men often proclaim themselves, and think themselves, indifferent to their riches, yet if asked to part with them would not yield up a penny; and if robbed of them would be miserable. As such men love their riches, so I will believe that she loves me. I am coming to see that men may control their judgments; that judgments which are false

are being perpetually suggested to us; and that sometimes we can hold to the true only by an act of will, which enables us to stop our ears to the words of the false witness within us."

Next day he continued—"At last—at last, I am happier. I have heard again from her—it is true a few lines only; but still they showed that she cannot be really changed. She is at Lichtenbourg with her children and the Princess. There have been, she says, no more cases of scarlatina. The place is pronounced safe; and she has told the Princess that I shall be there shortly. My work in London is at last over. The fatal papers will be sent to me at Lichtenbourg for my signature; and at last I am free. I leave England to-morrow."

## CHAPTER XXV.

As Grenville returned to Lichtenbourg, he could not help contrasting his journey *from* it, in Mrs. Schilizzi's company, with his present journey, in the company of nothing but his thoughts. It is true he was now hopeful, but his life was hope tempered with anxiety ; whereas on that former occasion, though trouble was indeed confronting him, he had hardly had more than a slight foretaste of those minute estrangements which, without killing their affection, had since then inflicted on it the shocks of repeated deaths. He hardly knew then the look of her face in anger. Now he had eaten of the tree of knowledge, and he knew.

At Vienna, however, where he was obliged

to pass the night, he was greeted at his hotel by a letter from her, telling him how she longed for his arrival. The phraseology, it is true, struck him as a little conventional; but under the circumstances he was satisfied. The following day, as he sat in the dusty railway-carriage, the thought of her welcome in the evening shone through his mind like sunlight; the nearer he got to her, the more did his doubts evaporate; and nothing disturbed him till, reaching a certain junction, he found that his train had just missed its connection, and that he would be three hours late in reaching his destination. This *contre-temps*, however annoying in itself, constituted, at all events, a valuable counter-irritant, which precluded the recrudescence of any sentimental sorrows; and when at last the later train, by which he was to proceed, arrived, Fate had arranged for him another and more agreeable distraction.

"I was still chafing inwardly," he wrote in his diary, "when Fritz, who had tried vainly to find an empty compartment for me,

ushered me into one which had but a single occupant. This was a man who, despite the warmth of the weather, had with him, though not on him, a magnificent rug of sables. The rug was what first struck me; but only a moment later I saw some more magnificence in the shape of a gorgeous dressing-bag. The possessor of all these splendours was himself oddly in keeping with them. In point of age he seemed a well-preserved seventy. His grizzled hair was curly; his grizzled moustaches waxed; one ungloved hand showed a number of turquoise rings; and there gleamed in his eyes, and lurked in his many wrinkles, a seasoned charity towards misconduct which evidently began at home. It was necessary for me to exchange one or two remarks with him, in connection with the moving of some packages; and I saw at once that I was talking to a polished man of the world. I suppose his perception paid me a similar compliment; for, presently producing a cigarette-case that was gilt and jewelled, and sparkled most



aggressively with the balls of a monstrous coronet, he offered me a cigarette, which, the moment I had taken a puff at it, I found to be more delicate than anything I before had tasted. Nothing foments confidence so much as fine tobacco. This, my companion told me, came from Egypt, where he gave me to understand he had means of securing what was choicest. I myself have been once or twice in Cairo, and I mentioned the names of several people connected with it. They were people of high position — travellers, financiers, diplomats, fashionable visitors, and friends of the late Khedive. The stranger knew all of them by name, and most of them personally. He had begun talking in French. His French was perfect; but he presently saw I was an Englishman, and began talking English. His English was equally good, except perhaps for the accent. I discovered that he knew London. He had been there for six weeks once. His acquaintance had not been large, but it seemed to have consisted exclusively of royal personages, of



diplomats, and some of the ultra-fashionable stars of society. Presently the name cropped up of our own ambassador at Vienna. My companion knew him intimately. I said that he was a friend of my own. My companion, whose keen eyes had caught my name on a luggage label, at once assumed a smile of mixed surprise and gratification, and flattered my sense of importance by asking me if I were myself. I told him I was. 'And you know,' he asked, 'Lady Ashford?' On my saying I did, he went on, 'She is coming to stay with me. I have an old castle not very far from Lichtenbourg.' A sudden light broke on me. This must be the Pasha or the devil. Perhaps he was both; he at any rate proved to be the former. I told him I had visited his castle, and that I was now going to Lichtenbourg. He begged me before I left to come for a few days and stay with him. I said, if I could I would. He little knew how unlikely I was to do so.

"When we reached our station, I was annoyed to find that this late train was met

by no conveyance from Lichtenbourg. There was one carriage only—a large break, with some coronets on it, whose balls looked like rows of brass-headed nails, and with four milk-white horses. The Pasha, discovering my plight, offered to take me with him, and send me over to Lichtenbourg the following morning; adding, what proved to be quite true, that there was rain in the clouds, and that I had better make sure of shelter. I thanked him, but declined his offer. Irma I knew would even now be waiting for me, and all my heart was famished for the sight of her. I told Fritz to go to a neighbouring posting-house and secure anything on wheels—if even an open cart—which would bring my luggage, and that I would walk on before him. I had a small bag containing a change of clothing, which I slung over my back, and prepared to set out on my pilgrimage. At this moment some drops began to fall, the air grew rapidly colder, and mixed with the rain came hail. For a moment I doubted whether I would go in this coming down-pour.

But my doubts were only momentary ; and to the dismay of Fritz I went. I was soon drenched. The rain blinded me, the hail stung me. In half an hour the roads were turning into quagmires, and darkness was coming before its time. I thought I should never arrive. I began to grow bewildered, and once or twice I thought I had lost my way. But at last arrive I did. I hurried through the clipped alleys ; I reached the well-known hotel. It was ten o'clock. I pushed the doors open roughly, and showed myself blinking in the hall, an object so strange and weather-beaten, that a waiter and a man from the bureau hurried out, ready to eject me. At last I was recognized ; and though they probably thought me mad, they showed me to the room I had ordered, where I hastily changed my things, and then demanded to be shown to the salon of Mrs. Schilizzi and the Princess. I entered. Irma was sitting at the table listlessly, by a great bowl of flowers, not expecting me, and not looking up at first. When she did look up,

a cry of delight broke from her. It seemed to me that I had not seen her for years; her voice at first sounded strange. Her face too looked strange. I seemed to have lost the clue to it. For a moment or two we were embarrassed; and then—we looked at each other, and were re-united. Yes—yes; but what happened then? She took my hand and held it. I did not think that that would be all. Some other seal of welcome, some other touch with healing in it—she saw that I expected this; but all in a second, like the writing on Belshazzar's wall, a frown appeared on her forehead, and she almost pushed me from her. 'How *can* you be so silly?' she exclaimed, in a stinging emphatic whisper. 'My aunt's in the next room. Have you absolutely no consideration for me?' I felt that this was unjust. Her conduct at this moment was far more likely to reach the ears of the Princess than the gift of a noiseless moment, which would have satisfied me. 'You know,' she went on, still chilling me by her accent, 'you know that I am glad to

see you. But it would have been far better had you managed to come earlier, or else had put off calling on us till some time to-morrow morning.' At this moment the door of the neighbouring room opened, and in bustled the Princess, her face wrinkled with smiles. She asked me how it was I had managed to come so late. I told her about the trains. I told her also that I had walked. 'Walked!' she exclaimed; 'and in this rain; and all these long nine miles!' I said I had told her niece that I hoped to join them at dinner, and so was determined to reach them in time to excuse myself that night for my absence. As I said this, I was aware that Irma started; and I felt that her eyes were fixed on me with a new expression. I met them in one rapid look, and they were full of a repenting tenderness. And now, too, her voice came musical to my ears with solicitude, as she exclaimed to her aunt, 'And most likely he's had no dinner. Do let us ring, and see if we can't get him something here.'

“The Princess assented. She also was full of kindness ; but just at this juncture Fritz appeared at the door, announcing not only that he had arrived and the luggage, but also that a supper for me was ready in my own room. Till a moment ago I had no knowledge that I was hungry. But the change in Irma’s manner, I suppose by restoring peace to me, left me free to listen to the cries of appetite. I was more than hungry. I was faint indeed ; and confessing as much, I left them, receiving as I went from Irma’s hand and eyes an assurance whose charm made every nerve cease aching. In the passage the manager met me, wanting to tell me something about the money I lent the doctor. I gather it will be repaid in a day or two. If that is the case, it will no doubt be a great convenience to me. I shall hear about it to-morrow. I couldn’t attend to-night. Wearied as I am by my walk, and disposed to sleep as I am by my supper, I have only been able to get through this piece of diary, because I am inspired by the happiness which her last



look gave me. Irma, so long as you are true to me, I can bear anything; and I can see ahead of us many things that must be borne. Let us try together so to bear all, that what is ignoble in many cases may not be so in ours. Irma, during the days which we still have to ourselves, never quarrel with me—never move aside from me. Watch with me. Is there in the heart of things any reason why I should not say, *Pray with me?* I shall see you, I shall be with you, to-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow, and many to-morrows afterwards, uninterrupted. Be to me always what you have been!”

This last request, though it never reached Mrs. Schilizzi's ears, was granted by her during the next few days partially, though not entirely. She never quarrelled with him. The daggers he had discovered she could use were all hid in their sheaths; but her old frankness, at once passionate and childlike, was, except on rare occasions, troubled by a certain nervousness, which was not far from

irritability, and which sometimes indeed only avoided being so by taking the form of preoccupation.

The proximate cause of this was evidently the presence of the Princess, from whose company they could escape only for precarious intervals. People who judge of the lives of others from a distance, are accustomed to make light of impediments of this kind. They quote the proverb, "Where there's a will there's a way," and affirm that if somebody had but really wished it, he or she could of course have done so-and-so. Such critics of conduct entirely fail to realize how strong are the fetters, fine and invisible though they may be, which the most trivial of social circumstances can sometimes weave around us ; and Grenville and Mrs. Schilizzi constantly found now that a *tête-à-tête* was as wholly beyond their reach as if for the time being there was a whole ocean between them. He, however, could not get rid of the feeling that the difficulties which beset them were sometimes unnecessarily increased by a perverse



timidity on her part, the suspicion of which pained and troubled him. Still, in spite of all this, hardly a day passed on which they did not secure at least an hour together—either in the sitting-room, when the Princess was enjoying her siesta, or else where some seat in the gardens lurked amongst sequestered leafage.

During these interviews the last thing with which he could tax her was hardness; but at moments he was conscious on her part of a certain gentle shrinking from him, and her eyes appealed to him as if full of some unuttered truth which, it seemed, she longed to tell him, pleading with him for encouragement to do so. As for him, he vacillated between two moods—a mood of compassion, made all the deeper and more unselfish by the passion that was absorbed and lurked in it; and a mood of sadness caused by the importunate contrast between her old remembered frankness and this present estranging hesitancy.

At last she began to give him some clue

to her feelings. They were seated, as they often were, in the gardens. "Bobby," she began. He looked at her. Her eyes had tears in them. She glanced round her hastily to see that there was no one near, and took his hand, as if she were clinging to his sympathy. "Bobby," she began again, and her voice was oddly tremulous, "I wonder what you would do supposing that this happened—supposing that some day you were to discover I had become very good. Would you cease to care for me? Would you go quite away from me?"

His answer was, "No; you asked me that once before."

"I expect you would," she said, ignoring these last words. "Not at first, perhaps; but later. It would necessarily make some difference."

"Will you," he said presently, "be patient, and let me answer you slowly; and if you find me hesitating in my phrases, believe me that the reason is this—I am not trying to hide my thoughts, but to find them. Yes,"

he resumed, after a pause, "you are right. It would make a difference. It wouldn't destroy my affection for you; but I think that for that very reason it would separate us. Irma—what I am saying might, to a gross mind, seem to bear quite a base and selfish sense; but the gross mind would quite misapprehend me. That chain which you talk of severing, though important in one sense, in another sense how unimportant it has been to us! Subtly and closely as it has helped to bind us together, how few and how slender have been its links. We have not valued it for its own sake. It has been hidden and lost in its results. And yet, Irma—yet—how shall I pick my words? Listen—let me put it like this. We are accustomed to speak of ourselves as souls and bodies; and when affection is slight and passion strong, we are for practical purposes thus divisible; and we can, if we will it, sacrifice either element to the other. But when affection is not slight, but fills and absorbs the soul, the soul then fills and

absorbs the body; and the body is to this transfigured affection what the brain is to the intellect. Low and high, good and bad—you cannot cut up a unity into such divisions as these. Some people may say that it is nobler to think than to eat; but without doing the one we never shall do the other."

She watched him as he spoke, weighing every word, far out of reach of the hiss of any impure propriety, her heart not insulting her cheeks with the indecency of a blush. She was face to face with the eternal mysteries of existence—not a body, not a ghost, but a woman; and the eyes with which she watched him were, in the words of Byron, "All youth, but with an aspect beyond time." He saw that she expected him to continue. "I think," he said, "thus far I know my meaning clearly; but when I come to the practical application of it, I am doubtful. I naturally should incline to say that I couldn't part from you by halves. And yet, again, by no arguments of mine will I even

try to sway your conscience against your will. If your conscience tells you to take a certain course——”

He paused. “Dear,” she said, “go on. Tell me.”

“I believe,” he said, “I could bear any change in your conduct so long as it meant no change in your disposition towards me. I could never reproach you—never. And yet, if our dispositions remain unchanged—however I argue, I am brought back to this—our only course is to part or to change nothing.”

“Dear,” she said gently, “I haven’t the strength to change. But I must teach you a new lesson. You must pity as well as love me.”

This conversation left Grenville full of trouble, and presented his whole conduct in a new and ghastly light to him. So far indeed as it was conduct concerning himself only, his judgment of it was in no way altered; but if she were becoming unhappy on account of her own partnership in it, her unhappiness he felt

would be his work. So long as she was at peace with herself, her attachment to him might be raising her; but the moment she began to despise herself on account of it, it would begin to degrade and ruin both her and him together. And in that case he asked himself what course would be open to him? To abandon her and to remain with her seemed equally fraught with misery. These considerations gathered in his mind like clouds; but before they had done more than cast some advancing shadows, Mrs. Schilizzi's quiet seemed to have come back to her; and Grenville's storm floated away and evaporated. That evening, when he was playing a game of chess with her, she said,

"I agree with you quite in all that you said this morning. You took me too seriously; and yet I am glad you did—because else I should not have heard you explain the matter so clearly."

"What is he explaining?" said the Princess, looking up from her book. "Are you

two turning into philosophers over your game ?”

“We were puzzled by a problem,” said Grenville, “and have now solved it by experience.”

Next day, when they found themselves alone in the gardens, Mrs. Schilizzi alluded to this slight incident.

“You see,” she said, “how careful one ought to be. My aunt’s ears are like needles. I was in fault last night ; but I’m often afraid that you may say something imprudent. Do be kind to me ; don’t when we are with her lower your voice in talking to me, or do anything to suggest even that there is any understanding between us. Perhaps she would never dream of such a thing. Perhaps I’m absurdly nervous ; but think how fatal might be the least suspicion on her part. When I first met you,” she went on presently, “I would have sat with you and whispered with you for hours, if you would have condescended to do so, without a thought or fear of either my aunt or any one. But now—— This is



our seat ; I'm tired, Bobby. Let us sit down. You did the talking yesterday. Let me do it to-day. As I told you, dear, I have thought over all you said ; and I agree with it ; and oh, believe me, I don't want you to go. I think that yesterday I gave you a wrong impression ; and I think I was wrong about my own meaning myself. I think that what has been troubling me chiefly these last few days has not been the thought of sin ; for to-day, as much as ever, I feel that my soul has been made alive through you. But—I wonder if you would understand ? You are not a woman. How should you ? And for you things are all so different."

He protested that this was not so. She shook her head sadly, and not without an effort continued—

"As to the way in which most people would condemn me, in that way I don't condemn myself, and I don't pretend to. The hypocrisy of self-condemnation is as bad as the hypocrisy of self-approval. But what I feel is this. Till lately I had nothing that



I cared to conceal from any one; and now, as you saw in London, and as you again see here, I am obliged to conceal things even from my mother-in-law and my aunt; and by and by, Bobby, all this will be worse. Naturally I am so very simple. I like all things—even my sorrows—to be straightforward; and this seems to be destroying the simplicity of my life. I am not ashamed of loving you; nor am I ashamed of wronging Paul, for it is impossible for me to believe that I am doing so; but I am ashamed—or, at least, dear, I am troubled—by the thought of having to live with half my frankness gone.”

“I understand you,” he answered. “Irma, what can I say? If you suffer like this, it is I who have caused your suffering; and if for your sake I suffer in the same way myself, that will hardly be much comfort. Do you know, during the last two days I have thought your aunt has been wondering what keeps me at Lichtenbourg. Ah, if we only could both be open!”

“See!” she exclaimed, “here are the children. They have come out to look for us.”

And the happiness of a mother shone suddenly in her eyes, and gave to her laugh the gay ripple of girlhood.

Grenville was puzzled, as he had sometimes been before, by the odd inconsequence of her moods. He for his part, whatever might be the case with her, could not free his mind of the thoughts she had just suggested to him; and before they had another opportunity of renewing their conversation, he eased his mind by writing and transmitting to her the following note—

“I have been thinking of what you said about lying. I hate a lie just as you do. I remember once for a whole fortnight I felt contrite and humiliated by a lie I told to get off a dinner-party. Lying seems to reduce one to the level of a naughty school-boy. And yet even the early Christians, in times of persecution, though if questioned with regard to their faith they were, of course,

bound to bear witness to it, were expressly forbidden to let it be so much as suspected unnecessarily. If our faith to one another has any of those qualities in it, which we believe it to have, we may hope to protect it without stooping to a denial of it. We shall not for that reason lead a life that is externally easier, but at least we shall keep unsullied our own self-respect; and that is a talisman which will save us at least from one thing—that voluntary parting, more bitter than any enforced one, which is caused when two who have clung together faithfully, discover at last that neither is worth the faith of the other.”

That same evening she had one moment alone with him. She looked thoughtful, but much happier.

“Do you know,” she said to him hastily, “what you do, when you tell me things? You seem to cut an alley through a wood that I thought impassable, and I see suddenly a gleam of light at the end.”

“More philosophy!” exclaimed the Princess,

entering. "Come—come. We ordered dinner at seven. Give me your arm, Bobby Grenville, and let me totter along with you to the restaurant."

## CHAPTER XXVI.

GRENVILLE little knew when he took his seat at their table, how soon the peace in his mind, which just seemed to have renewed itself, was about to be broken again in a yet more serious way, and the bitterness of the lot he had chosen was again to make itself felt.

They were later than most of the company, and there were many people departing before their own meal had arrived at its middle stage. The Princess was studying the moving figures through her spectacles, when she suddenly, in her penetrating voice, exclaimed—

“Baron—baron, won’t you look at me?”

A tall, grizzled man started, and then caught sight of her. They shook hands

effusively. She asked him how long he had been at Lichtenbourg. He said for two days, and that that night he was leaving.

“You know my niece?” said the Princess.

The Baron turned to Mrs. Schilizzi.

“Of course,” he said; “but I have not met you since you were married. Once or twice I have seen you walking with your husband, and I wondered if my mind was deceiving me when it whispered that I had the honour of knowing you. Will you have the goodness to present me to Herr von Schilizzi?”

Grenville, despite every effort, was conscious that his brows contracted; and though as a matter of fact his colour changed but little, he felt that his face must be hot with indignant protest. The mistake was corrected almost as soon as made; and his vanity was soothed by finding that this stranger recognized his name when it was mentioned, and bowed to him with evident deference. But Mrs. Schilizzi had noted every change in his expression; and after the Baron had gone, she became

absorbed and silent. The manner of the Princess too, though he did not notice it at the time, underwent, as he reflected afterwards, an almost imperceptible change.

“The Baron,” she said to him presently, “has a beautiful old castle in Styria. There is hardly a roof that doesn’t let in the rain, and hardly a table with more than three legs. It’s so old and dirty, that I’m sure you should have a look at it.”

Grenville felt that this allusion to his tastes was not very sympathetic; and before dinner was over he became a trifle embarrassed by the Princess asking him what other antiquities he would visit, and when his official engagements would be taking him back to London. The doubt came back to him which he had mentioned to Mrs. Schilizzi, as to whether his continuance at Lichtenbourg had struck the Princess as curious; and instinct rather than reason at once supplied him with a defence.

As to his return to London, a vague answer was sufficient. “But as to old castles,” he

went on good-naturedly, "I have been asked to be a guest at another, and that is the castle of our Pasha. If I like to go there, I believe I shall be welcome in a week or so ; and meanwhile this is a charming place to wait at."

With this intelligence the Princess seemed quite content. With an almost motherly friendliness, "Help me up from my chair," she said, "and come to our room to be beaten again at chess."

The game that evening proceeded almost in silence. No word or look came from Mrs. Schilizzi which showed that her thoughts had strayed beyond knights and pawns and bishops. The following day when he started on his usual stroll with her, she surprised him by saying with decision—

"I am not going to stay out long." And as soon as they had reached a walk which was comparatively unfrequented, she began, "I want to tell you something. You had much better go away. It is best for every reason."



Surprised and bewildered, he asked her what she meant. "Where must I go? Why must I go? When?"

"Soon," she said. "Can't you see that my aunt is beginning to wonder about you? and any morning I may hear from my husband that he is coming. Indeed I shouldn't be surprised if he came without my hearing. I'm getting so uncomfortable I hardly know what to do."

It was not only what she said, but there was a peculiar quality in her manner, that roused in Grenville a certain sense of injustice, and seemed to have placed at once a distance between him and her.

"Certainly," he replied, "if you wish it, I will go. It is true I have nowhere to go to—except, I suppose, England. I have no home, as you know, either there or anywhere."

"England!" she exclaimed. "No—I didn't mean that."

"Well then, Paris, if you like it better. I can easily make arrangements to go by the evening train."

“Don’t be silly,” she cried. “Do try to understand me. I only mean, go away for a day or two ; and if you like to do so, come back when Paul arrives. It matters about my aunt, so much more than about him ; and if you are here when he is, it will look so much better to her.”

“Do you mean then that I must go at once ? Tell me. I am at your orders.”

Her tone was almost tender ; but as she went on it grew chilly again. “No—no—I don’t want you to go to-day. That would look worse than if you remained till Christmas. But talk to my aunt about going—make her think you are going. It will be quite enough, in any case, if you go to the Pasha for a day or two. Come,” she said presently, “I must be turning back again. For the last two mornings I have neglected my children ; and I mean to teach them some lessons before luncheon.”

Grenville could not help being annoyed at the instructions given him. The matter of them he could bear, but what he could not

bear was the manner. The former affected him like any ordinary pain, which he could accept with fortitude and acquiescence; but the latter seemed rather to produce some irritated rebellion of the nerves, whose action lay beyond the province of fortitude. "Of course," he said to himself, "I will go should she really wish it; or even if I see myself that it is well for her that I should go. But she seems to think that if she wishes to send me away, I can be sent away like a footman, and rung for when I again am wanted."

In this language he recognized the return of the temper which had attacked and tortured him in London, and with which he had so long struggled there. He found, however, that he had since then advanced considerably in the art of self-discipline. The cruel thoughts that now whispered themselves in his ear against her he managed to charm away, by quoting from his memory, as a saint might quote a text to the devil, some former words of love, or some look of trust and kindness. He tried to place himself in her

exact position, and see the requests she made him as he supposed she saw them herself. He also—although on reflection he considered them quite unnecessary—faithfully followed her instructions with regard to his conduct towards the Princess. Without committing himself to a statement as to when he was going to leave, he let the Princess know, as he could do with perfect truth, that he expected very shortly to be going to see the Pasha; and more than this, with regard to Mrs. Schilizzi, he put, out of deference to her wishes, a restraint on his manner and movements, whenever they were in the Princess's presence, which seemed as superfluous to his judgment as it was trying to his feelings.

But though Grenville outwardly was perfectly calm and good-tempered, and to Mrs. Schilizzi, whenever he was alone with her, tender, his life for the next few days was one constant effort of self-control. Apart from the Princess or her children he daily saw less and less of her. She did not deny him the walks which had by this time become

habitual; but she professed a distaste for the lonelier parts of the gardens; she kept as much as she could to the paths which were most frequented; and she seemed by preference to take the children with her. She did not find fault or quarrel with him; but she did what was more estranging. She avoided, so far as she could, all topics that were personal, and whenever he tried to approach them, she adroitly turned to others. He had sometimes thought her hard, he had sometimes thought her cruel. He was now fretted with an even worse suspicion of her—that so far as he was concerned she was gradually showing herself frivolous.

Inward troubles like these, depending on such slight vicissitudes, seem to many people to be hardly troubles at all, and to need on a man's part no firmness in bearing them. Let such people consider how small and hidden an injury in the vital parts of the body may cause the most intolerable suffering; and they then may learn that a mind may be sometimes as sensitive as a

stomach, and that the finest minds, though they may show suffering least, are those that feel it most, and need most strength to bear it. Grenville's secret sufferings were of two kinds. First was the sense, made the more difficult to deal with because it was doubtful, that the woman who had been so near to him was now gradually withdrawing herself; whilst a phantom was constantly facing him of his own coming desolation. Secondly was a sense of his own unutterable folly, supposing this woman to be actually thus treating him. All the thoughts which were in the service of his own self-love began to plot together, and break out into insurrections, threatening her and clamouring to be revenged on her; but never once, by an angry look or word, did he allow a sign of this inward tumult to escape him. On the contrary, whilst one part of his mind was stinging him with distrust of her and resentment, he forced himself, by the aid of another part, to act as if he completely trusted her. However unreasonable or capricious her conduct and words might seem to



him, he forced himself to interpret them in some way to her advantage; nor did he relax his forbearance, though it hourly grew more difficult, as he looked in vain for any sign that she was touched by it, or was even aware of it.

As time went on the situation became nearly intolerable. Every day he hoped for some softening change in her, and every day was the casket of some fresh and complete disappointment. Not only did she avoid anything like personal conversation, but she avoided even the literary and other subjects in which formerly she had shown the deepest interest; or if for a moment or two she would now and then allude to them, instead of considering what he said, she ignored or sharply contradicted it. At last, indeed, he was growing to dread rather than look forward to his meetings with her; when one morning, to his extreme surprise, she received him with a voice and look like those of their early days—those days in the forest, which seemed now like some lost existence.

"Bobby," she said softly, "I have a great deal to say to you. I am going this morning to take you for a walk in the country—you see I am ready. Have you got your hat? Then come."

Hardly able to believe in such a return of happiness, Grenville walked by her side, unconscious of the road they were taking, till she said, "We will go to a place where I took you once before." He then realized that they were on their way to the mill. "Listen," she went on presently. "This morning I have heard from Paul. He perhaps will be here to-morrow, or at farthest the day after; and my aunt, who has only been staying here in order to keep me company, has settled already to return home after luncheon."

Grenville looked at her, and received the news in silence. One curious thing struck him about her. Circumstances were approaching which, more than all others, might seem calculated to increase the nervousness she had so often before exhibited; but the nervousness instead of increasing seemed to



have wholly vanished. She was serious indeed ; but so far as frankness goes, she was as fearlessly, as affectionately frank, as she had been on the lake or in the hunting-lodge. Only now even she surprised him by what seemed an outburst of caprice, though it was not of a kind to pain him ; and her manner, even if it had been, was quite enough to have robbed it of every sting. “Darling !” she exclaimed suddenly,—it was long since she had used that word,—“will you mind if I ask you one thing ? Let us turn back now, and go for this walk later. My aunt will have left by that time ; and the whole afternoon will be our own. I don’t want to be hurried. I have so much to say to you.”

Grenville assented, and they returned almost in silence—a silence of union, not a silence of estrangement.

“I hope,” said the Princess to Grenville, just before her departure, when Mrs. Schilizzi happened to have left the room, “I hope you’ll write and tell me of your visit to this wonderful Pasha ; and if you have time on

your hands, come back again to me. I," she continued, "am wanted here no longer, now that Irma will have her husband; and I've business at home that has been asking for me for the last five days. As you are not going directly, you of course will make his acquaintance. He's not grand, like your friends the Count and Countess—but I don't know any one with a better head on his shoulders."

Grenville wondered if in this there was any oblique hint to himself. Of one thing he had become aware at all events, that the Princess saw no need of conveying any hints to her niece.

"Tell me," said Mrs. Schilizzi, when the Princess had driven off, "should you mind, Bobby, if we took the children with us? It would give them so much pleasure; and I should like it myself, for other reasons. I can't bear to think that you should come between me and them; and indeed you don't! But I was a little afraid of you thinking that they might come between you and me. They won't; but I'll do as you wish about it."

"Take them," he said; and she saw that he said it willingly.

They went again by the way they had gone that morning. They came to the place where the well-remembered path took them from the high-road, and led them by the willows and the river.

"Have you forgotten," she said to him, "the day when I first brought you here? I keep in my mind every word that you said to me. My soul was being born that day, and all the world seemed beautiful."

"I," he answered, "have also forgotten nothing."

"Let us," she said, "for the time—let us forget something. Let us forget our troubles. For a few hours let us be happy. Let our walk now be a continuation of our other walk. Bobby, you smile. For a few hours be happy with me." She took his arm for a moment or so, and leant on it. "Look," she exclaimed presently, "did you see that water-ousel, with its little white breast? How pretty it was! It darted out from the shadow of those two

bushes. Those bushes when last we were here had very few leaves on them. You picked up a stone, when we went past them. I remember what you said. I wonder if you do? You said that when two people were really fond of each other, the heavens were opened for them. I wonder, Bobby, if they will be open for me much longer?"

Before he could answer she had begun calling to the children, as if to escape from feelings which she could no longer control. "Come," she said, "both of you and show me those pretty flowers." The children came, and trotted like dogs along by her, extracting a promise that they should have tea at the mill. They had it in the summer-house which Grenville so well remembered. Every incident of that first visit to it recurred to him. His present life was then just beginning, with all its rapture, and all its unforeseen bitterness. The rude green table, scratched over with the names of tourists, stared at him like some papyrus inscribed with his own destiny. But what that destiny was, was still a riddle

to him. Was it heaven or ruin? At this moment it seemed heaven. Irma was by his side; and the children were laughing close to them. They too laughed with the children, distributing the simple delicacies; and to all four of them cakes and cream and sugar seemed for the moment to be the greatest pleasures of life, and its most important problem the division of them.

At last when the little mouths were beginning to move more slowly, Mrs. Schilizzi said, "Now, children, go and play." Off they flew like two obedient butterflies, and the mother's face then turned towards Grenville, and her lips said tremulously, "Listen—I want to speak to you."

"Yes?" he said. He saw that she struggled for her voice. She found it only with an effort.

"Bobby," she said at last, "you won't go away and leave me?"

With the eloquence that lies only in words broken and chosen helplessly, he protested that he would not, "Why," he asked, "should you think so?"

"For many reasons," she said. "I can hardly tell yet how many. When Paul comes, I shall know."

"Does he mind what you do, Irma?"

"He would mind," she said, "anything which he thought was an affront to himself. But he doesn't care in any other way. How I spend my life, or that I have a life to spend, is a thing that hardly occurs to him. But the fonder I am of you—does not this seem strange?—the stronger grows my sense of the duties I owe to him."

"No," said Grenville, "I don't think it is strange."

"I want," she went on, "to give him all I can, except one thing—to wait on him when he orders me; to be good-tempered with him; to be his hired companion—to respect his crotchets—to be a good ornamental servant—to give him what he has paid for. And to give him this, dear, I shall have to be robbing you—I mean of my time. Often I shall be unable to see you; and then you will be disgusted, and angry with me."

"Never," he said, "never. And yet, Irma, I may be tempted to be. I know what an unreasonable thing one's reasoning often is; but, in my real heart of hearts, instead of being angry, I shall admire you. We talked about truth the other day. You see yourself how truth is still open to you."

"Perhaps it is," she answered. "Still I am getting so fearful. Bobby—if I seem to neglect you, will you promise me not to be angry? Oh—but that's not the worst. Many little things may happen, and I shall be forced to lie. I shall—I foresee it all. Listen," she went on, and looked him full in the eyes—"I am naturally very truthful; and if ever you find I am not so—I don't mean not so to you—will you promise me to remember this?—that I

'Put to proof art alien to the artist,  
Once, and only once, and for one only.'

Yes—I know you think you will. I see your lips move, but I can't hear what you say. But I wonder if you will really. Oh, tell me



—tell me, if I have to lie for you, tell me you won't hate me."

"Irma," he said, "the very fact that you ask me this, is a proof that you never can do anything that will part me from you. Whatever blame there may be to fall on any one, it will be mine, not yours."

"Tell me," she went on, hardly heeding his words, and yet reassured by the tone of them, "tell me, Bobby, that I may always lean upon you—always feel that in spirit, even if not in the body, you are close to me, that you are upholding me, and that you will never, never abandon me. Will you never go away from me? Are you sure? Are you quite sure?"

Her hand had stolen into his, holding it in a convulsive clasp. He answered her slowly, "I am weighing each word I utter. Look—the people of the mill are moving about in sight of us; the children are close by; I can do nothing but speak. I put all my life into those four words—I am quite sure."

"I believe you," she said. "I am happier. Come, let us go back again."

Next morning she sent him a note early.

“Paul,” it ran, “will be here at ten. He has been travelling all night. Let me see you in the garden, just for one five minutes.”

They met. There was little to say. Their thoughts seemed to partake of the breathless character of their words; but he pulled from his pocket a crumpled sheet of paper, and said to her—

“See—this is what I wrote last night.”

“Read it,” she said. “We still have a minute or two. Sit down here, and read it; and let me look at it whilst you do so.”

What he read was as follows; and when he had read it, she took the paper from him.

“Your eyes and mine are turned towards the light;  
How can our footsteps tend towards the night?  
They do not—cannot: though above our road  
Sorrow and clouds are gathering like a load.  
For learn this secret: 'Tis to us allowed  
To make a silver lining to our cloud:  
And we will turn the dark to daylight by  
That one clear lamp—our own fidelity.  
You will be faithful—will you? This I know,  
I shall not leave you till you make me go.”

## CHAPTER XXVII.

THIS brief interview was duly noted in his diary, which continued thus :—

“ The event of this morning, though I knew it must happen some day, used to seem as vague a thing to me as to healthy people death seems. Latterly, indeed, I had felt its aspect growing day by day distincter ; but distincter only as being more distinctly miserable : and even now it has taken place I am doubtful what it may portend. Anyhow, this man has at last become a reality for me, and what I think of myself will depend on what I think of him. Hitherto, though I have met and talked and dined with him, he has been a mere abstraction to me ; and I had begun to wonder whether my recollection of him could

be accurate, and whether it might not be doing him some grotesque wrong. Should such prove to be the case, I foresaw that my position would be this—the better I was obliged to think of him, the worse I should be obliged to think of two other people. Am I then, in order to think well of myself, reduced to the necessity of hoping that I may be able to think ill of another? No—not quite that. I don't want him to be bad. Let him be indifferent to her—that is all I ask for. I should hate to injure him. Let me find that he is incapable of being injured. Hitherto I have often said to myself that if I influence his life at all, it will be for good, because I may help her to bear his yoke more happily. But now that the time has come for putting this view to the test, doubts have begun to trouble me. I was thinking only yesterday that when he came, it would be like the day of judgment, arraigning me and revealing me before myself. And now he has come, and, like the day of judgment, suddenly.

“To a certain extent, what I have just

written is ancient history. When events which we have long been dreading actually arrive, we often find them to be like shadows, which look absolutely black from a distance, but which prove when we enter them to be merely a clouded daylight. That was my experience this morning. We were in the garden for very few minutes. He was expected by ten at the earliest, and our watches were not hurrying us ; but so anxious was she to be on the spot awaiting him, that we were back at the hotel a quarter before the hour. She paused on the steps, and said to me—

“ ‘What will you do to-day ? I shall hardly be able to see you—indeed, I had better not.’ ”

“ A sudden inspiration came to me. ‘ I will go,’ I said, ‘ and call on the Pasha.’ ”

“ The proposal pleased her. We entered. When we were in the hall, the first thing that met our eyes was a large portmanteau, with the letters ‘ P. S.’ painted on it.

“ ‘ He has come ! ’ she cried. ‘ Don’t move a step farther with me.’ ”

“ And before I had time to think, she was

hurrying up the stairs. As for me, I was on the point of returning to the garden, when I heard her break into a laugh, and distinguished this exclamation, 'Well!' She had reached the first landing, and a man had come down towards her. I could not move. I was constrained to observe the meeting. I saw his boots first—shining varnished boots, with buff tops to them. Then I saw his whole figure. Yes, there he was—my friend of the Orient Express, even worse than I had pictured him. They shook hands; and then, as if he were performing some necessary duty, he gave her a hasty kiss, seeming relieved when it was over. 'I suppose,' he said, 'you have had your coffee long ago. As for me, I've been ordering a d——d good English breakfast.' And he made a cluck with his tongue, as I had heard him do in the train—a sign, I presume, of satisfaction at his own promptitude.

"All this took place in considerably less than a minute. I turned away, and the weight on my heart was lightened. How well I remembered his voice. In the train I had

thought it oily. It sounded now as if there were a sort of grit in it. Its tone was hard, almost ironical—the very negation of affection.

“At this moment I was button-holed by the hotel manager. ‘The doctor,’ he said, ‘will repay me in a week your loan to him. He told me so last night. He was very anxious about the matter. Of course I have never said that the money came from your Excellency.’ Well—I have been looking at my bank-book. The repayment will be very welcome; but just then the matter came to me as an irritating trifle.

“I wandered out of doors. I determined to avoid meeting them. *Them*, I say—*them*! How strange it seems to be obliged to think of her as bound to any human being besides myself!—to find suddenly that I am an outsider! But after all it is easier to bear than I expected. The look of the man, the coldness of his greeting—that has taken my worst fears away, and I found myself, to my surprise, almost in good spirits.

“My one wish now was to be away for the



whole day ; so without returning to the hotel, I went to a stand of carriages, and taking a light *fiacre* at once set off for my Pasha's. Was it pain or pleasure that filled me during the drive ? I can hardly tell ; but I know that all the way *her* voice was in my ears, *her* cheeks were close to me ; her presence was in the woods and brooks, still lingering there like a perfume. I reached the castle, as I had expected, just about the hour of *déjeuner*. I sent in my card, and a smooth-faced French valet soon appeared at the gates, who smilingly invited me to enter. I was taken up a private staircase, to a round room in a tower, where I found the Pasha arranged tastefully on a divan. He was draped in a gorgeous dressing-gown, and reading a French novel. My eyes were so dazzled by the red and gold on the walls, and by silver crescents studding an azure ceiling, that the Pasha had risen and was hospitably pressing my hand before I was aware of seeing anything clearly. He was charmed, he was ravished to receive me. He had feared I had quite forgotten him. Break-

fast would be ready presently. Would I excuse him whilst he completed his toilette? He took me by the arm, and led me to another room—a room which I recognized, dim with purple velvet, and glimmering through its dimness with silver inkstands and blotting-books. He left me here alone with a copy of the *Vie Parisienne*, and presently reappeared, doing infinite credit to his tailor, illuminated by three rose-buds and some maiden-hair fern in his buttonhole, and breathing perfume like a god of Greek mythology.

“‘Let us descend,’ he said. ‘By the way, there is here a friend of yours. You must come and pass some days with me, and help me to entertain her. I have now here only ladies. There was a gentleman coming, but he has failed me.’

“Before I had time to ask him who my friend was, some folding-doors were thrown open by a servant, and I found myself in the vaulted hall, with its mountains of Florentine furniture. Amongst these in a moment I distinguished the figure of Lady Ashford,

and was conscious at the same time of the rustle of other dresses besides hers. Lady Ashford greeted me with her usual charm of manner; but I fancied—though this must have been fancy only—that she eyed me a little curiously, as if thinking of the prophecies she had made about me two months ago. She certainly expressed surprise at my not being yet at Constantinople. Then, whilst we were talking, there appeared from behind a piano—who? Why the very two ladies who had been pointed out to me in the Prater—the Baroness X—— and Miss Juanita Markham. The Baroness is a woman of disagreeable expression, youthful in dress, in years a faded fifty; and there is all the light of superannuated intrigue in her eyes. As for the girl, her whole toilette was wonderful. Her dress suggested a yachting costume, but there was nothing loud or startling in it. It was wonderful for a far more subtle reason. It seemed in its fit and finish like a caress or embrace by herself of her own beauty. It specially called attention to her throat, her

waist, and her wrists. Her faultless shoes did the same thing for her feet, and her dainty fringe for her forehead. Her hands, exquisitely modelled, quietly called attention to themselves. Why do I write all this? Why do I notice these things? I suppose because she contrived to make me notice them. And yet never was there a girl whose demeanour was more fastidiously quiet. Let me say no more about her. To me she is less than nothing. I hardly spoke to her.

“Suddenly a gong sounded, as if in honour of some Indian idol, and we went in to breakfast. On our way we passed through that series of gaudy rooms, with their jewelled armour on their walls, and with their tapestry hangings, at which Irma and I smiled. Lady Ashford sat on one side of me, and the Baroness on the other. The Baroness peered at me superciliously. I talked almost entirely to Lady Ashford. We talked naturally of what had happened to us since the night of our dinner-party in Vienna; and again she asked me when I was going to begin my

duties. I cannot flatter myself that I was extremely candid; and oddly enough, neither was she. I felt certain she was not, from her manner. She had been in Italy—there was nothing odd about that; but then, she had come back to Vienna instead of going to London; and about this move of hers there was evidently some mystery. Later on, I obtained, as I think, a clue to it.

“The Pasha after breakfast insisted on taking us for a drive. We all sat together in the brake which had taken him from the station. I did not enjoy myself. I was constantly and unpleasantly aware that that girl’s eyes were trying to catch mine. I exerted myself to talk, but my voice was far from my thoughts, like that of a plover crying far from its nest. The Pasha insisted that I should remain for dinner; and in one way I was glad to do so, as I wished to be as late as I could in getting back to Lichtenbourg. After our drive he took me to his smoking-room. He is certainly an agreeable man, and his manners are highly polished. Indeed they are like furniture on

which the polish is hardly dry. As for origin, he comes, I believe, of a distinguished family ; but still, though he is as much of a gentleman as an adventurer could well be, what one sees first in him is the adventurer rather than the gentleman. Well—having talked about everybody, and almost everything, in Europe and in Egypt, he told me he had been expecting a visit from the King of Moldavia, who I then recollected had a villa at Lichtenbourg. I saw in his eye an odd ambiguous light, and I suddenly began to suspect what I am quite sure is the truth. He had asked Miss Markham here in order that she might meet the King. The King, it appears, however, is not able to come ; and the Pasha is consequently finding his party a trifle flat. ‘Lady Ashford,’ he said with a certain discontented dryness, ‘is here looking after her niece, whose chest is delicate, and who ought to avoid draughts. I fear Lady Ashford gives herself unnecessary trouble. Baroness X—— could have taken care that Miss Markham took no cold.’



“‘My dear man,’ I said mentally to him, ‘Baroness X—— could take care of most things.’ Yes—Miss Markham is obviously the reason of her aunt’s return to Vienna, and of her presence here. It’s an odd story, full of painful suggestions; and it made me glad when I was once quit of the gates, and breathing the clear night air, on my way back through the forests. Irma, since I have known you, things shock and pain me which once I should have laughed at with indifference.

“It was eleven o’clock when I arrived. Fritz was full of alarm about me. And so at last this strange day is over. The morning of it seems to me as if it were years ago; and as for *her*, when did I last see her? When shall I see her next? And how? Will it be to-morrow?”

To this closing question events answered Yes; and they gave their answer early. About ten o’clock he hoped he might have a note from her; and to kill the intervening time which, when he was dressed, confronted him, he walked down to the springs, and watched



the morning water-drinkers. These were now numerous — a variegated and well-dressed crowd ; some clustering round the pavilions at which the several waters were dispensed, others moving slowly along the winding walks. Grenville looked on with an absent kind of amusement, his eyes caught at times by some dress or parasol that shone like a wandering flower. But how little to him, he reflected, did the whole world mean now, when he suddenly saw with a start, amongst all these nameless figures, a dress which he thought he recognized. He was right. Mrs. Schilizzi was there. She was some fifty yards away ; she was walking slowly. There were many people near her ; but so far as Grenville could judge, she was without any companion. He hurried across the grass ; he overtook her ; he spoke to her. Again, as he did so, some of his old doubts returned, as to how she would greet him. The fantastic fear had seized him that the last four-and-twenty hours might have worked some complete change in her, that she would stare at him as if he were

a stranger, and resent his approach as an impertinence. And once again his fantastic fears were dissipated.

"I looked for you yesterday," she said. "I thought we might have seen you in the restaurant, or at the band in the evening."

He told her that he had purposely stayed away all the day.

"Well," she said, "I dare say you were right; but I wanted you so. I was feeling so depressed and lonely. Tell me," she went on quickly, "you're not going away again to-day, are you?"

"No," he answered, "of course not—not if I can be with you."

"You can be with me, I think," she said, "almost as much as you like. Paul has found some friends here — business friends from Vienna; and all yesterday afternoon he spent with them playing billiards in the café. He seems in quite a good humour, and was cross only twice—once about his breakfast, and once about his bedroom. But as for that,

they've given him another now, not in the hotel itself, but in the *annexe*, over the café. He's delighted with that. He feels himself quite a bachelor. I told him you were here, and that I had met you at my aunt's. He had found out all about you soon after parting from you in the train; and so far as I can see he's rather proud of my knowing you. I told him too that it was through you I had heard of the hotel in the forest: you need therefore make no mysteries about it. He's here somewhere with some of his billiard-playing friends. I must introduce you, and you must come and breakfast with us at the restaurant. See, there he is. Come with me, and let us meet him."

A figure clothed in a suit of light lavender grey, and adorned by a brilliant flower, was now visible moving across the grass towards them. As it came nearer, there could be distinguished, in addition to the flower, the brightness of teeth revealed by a long smile, and then the restless gleam of two dark almond-shaped eyes. As all these details

became more distinct, Grenville thought that Mrs. Schilizzi must have been somewhat mistaken as to the good-humour she had claimed for her husband; for the smile, which at a distance had seemed to corroborate what she said, was at a closer view far more like a grin of irritation, and said in advance to his wife, almost as plainly as if he had shouted it, "Who the devil is this you have ventured to pick up and to be talking to?" But the moment he realized who her companion was his air changed, and his face took the very expression which a moment ago Grenville had falsely attributed to it.

"Ah, Mr. Grenville," he exclaimed, "delighted to come across you again! I didn't know in the train what a distinguished person I was travelling with. Mrs. Schilizzi tells me you have been of the greatest help to her. And then, too, you know the Princess. Ah, Mr. Grenville, charming old lady that is! Of course," he went on, not indeed taking Grenville's arm, but sidling along close to him, as if he would have liked to do so, "coming from

Turkey as I do, your name is a household word to me. We hope you are going to bring us a new epoch of prosperity. The country, Mr. Grenville, wants only two things—sound finance and a railway system. You will give them the one; I have begun the other. We built a bridge last month out of the seats of an old Greek theatre—all of marble, and a third of the price of brick.”

Grenville hardly knew in what way to comport himself; but instinct prompted him with the manner which reflection would have led him to cultivate. He was perfectly civil; he listened with an air of interest; but neither in look nor tone was there any trace of a wish to allow his acquaintance with his companion to approach the domain of friendship. Mr. Schilizzi, however, it seemed was entirely satisfied; and when Grenville had responded sufficiently to the above introductory observations, he at once went on to ask him about some racing stables which he heard were in the neighbourhood. Grenville was unable to give him any information; that subject there-

fore dropped. All this while they had been strolling in the direction of the hotel, and Mrs. Schilizzi now had walked on a little ahead of them. At the same moment there sailed past them a gorgeously-dressed lady, whose character, with a happy clairvoyance, Mr. Schilizzi recognized. He slightly nudged Grenville, and, with an air of furtive connoisseurship, "Did you see that?" he said. "That was a well-made woman."

"Paul," said Mrs. Schilizzi, looking back, "we breakfast at twelve, don't we? As you won't put up with the children's dinner, we shall now be obliged to go always to the restaurant; so I have told Mr. Grenville that if he likes he can share our table with us."

"Delighted," said Mr. Schilizzi. "I always say that at meals a *tête-à-tête* is a mistake. My dear, I should advise you to go back to your rooms, or you'll never be ready for luncheon at twelve o'clock." Obedient to this airy sarcasm, Mrs. Schilizzi left them. Mr. Schilizzi looked round him, as if relieved by



her absence. "This place," he exclaimed, "is not a patch upon Smyrna!"

"Indeed?" replied Grenville.

Mr. Schilizzi thréw back his head, and half closed his eyes, in a parenthesis of ecstatic memory. "The girls there," he said, "if you know where to look for them—God bless me, you never saw such a thing! By the way," he went on, for a wonder changing the subject, "do you play at billiards? No? They've a new table here—an English one—cushions perfect. Schwabe and I were playing till eleven o'clock last night. I've found two of my friends," he went on, "undergoing a little of the waters—and, I fancy, a good bit of the wine—with whom at Vienna I do a bit of racing sometimes. My wife won't know 'em; and so, between you and me,"—Mr. Schilizzi's voice became easily confidential,—“they have not the opportunity of telling tales out of school. I've promised to meet them at half-past ten at the café. Ah—there they are, by Gad! Are you willing to join us?"

Grenville declined on some plausible pre-



text. Mr. Schilizzi waved a lavender glove at him, and grinning, "Then *au revoir!*" rapidly strode away, and soon had his hands on the shoulders of a couple of Semitic dandies.

"Certainly," Grenville reflected, as he wandered off alone, "in no sense other than a theoretical one have I done this man so much as the shadow of a wrong. I have interrupted no union that ever existed; or whatever there was to interrupt has long since ceased. The only union that exists between him and her—and there is one—may desolate my own life; but my life does nothing to disturb *it*. The case is quite the contrary. She, sustained by the consciousness of my friendship and constancy, will perform better all the duties, and the only duties, she owes him. She will bear with him; she will consult his welfare; she will be for him everything she has been, except being again a mother; and as for her love, poor child, if he ever thought he possessed it, it was merely because he cared for it so little that he never

noticed its absence. Noticed its absence!" his thoughts repeated presently. "Do I not know that he actually would have resented its presence? No—to a man like that I have certainly done no wrong."

These considerations were his companions, as he rapidly moved along, and absorbed him so completely that he hardly knew where he was going, till he suddenly found himself in the deep quiet of the country, and realized that his steps had taken him, almost without his consciousness, to the river-side path leading to the well-known mill.

The whole scene was haunted for him with memories of certain moments—with images of the children playing amongst the flowers, and making a heaven on the green floor of the meadows, and the mounting movement both of his soul and of hers, towards an opening heaven of the spirit, of which childhood was an unconscious reflection. And other memories too mixed themselves soon with these, tearful and plaintive, like a drift of rain sweeping suddenly into the wind—

memories of her entreaties that he would never despise or hate her. He remained for a long time motionless, leaning on a broken post, whilst his thoughts of the present were shifted under the influence of the past. The sense of relief brought to him by his study of Mr. Schilizzi's character slowly gave way to a sense of new anxiety, which already indeed had touched him, but which he had not till now quite realized. What he now began to ask himself was, How should he treat this man?

"We know little," he reflected, "when we enter on such a situation as mine, what problems it may in time reveal to us. It is like a plant whose thorns sleep in the sprouting stalk. It must root itself and grow in our lives till we really can know its nature. This man," he continued, "I can't be uncivil to him. Why should I be? On the contrary, I will, unknown to him, do him any good turn in my power. Only it must be unknown to him. I will never have him thanking me ;

and never from him will I take the smallest favour. And Irma—what of her? Does the situation to her seem as hard as it does to me? She appeared this morning to be such a complete mistress of it! I ought to think of her far more than of myself. My moral anxiety was just now too selfish. And yet, in a way, things are simpler for her than for me. However civil and friendly she may be to her husband, she is merely paying him what he may justly claim. He will not put, and he will not want to put, any interpretation on her goodness which would make it false or treacherous.”

Thoughts are sometimes far more rapid than any possible record of them, sometimes far slower. In this case they were far slower; and the stroke of a distant clock here warned Grenville that already it wanted only half an hour of twelve. He hurried back, mindful of his engagement for breakfast, half in eagerness to rejoin one of the party, half shrinking from the prospect of even apparent amity with the other. His way to the

restaurant led him close to the café. The tall doors were open. In front of them were chairs and tables; and there, seated with an empty liqueur glass in front of him, and quietly winking an eye at a neat *demoiselle de comptoir*, with whom he was affecting to haggle over a few *kreutzers*, was Mr. Schilizzi basking in happy idleness. He called to Grenville, and, jumping up from his seat, swore pleasantly at the time, which was, he declared, past twelve, and hurried into the hotel, with somewhat of the air of a terrier, saying, "I must worry my wife out. She was never punctual in her life."

He presently reappeared, having accomplished this chivalous purpose; and he, Grenville, and Mrs. Schilizzi were soon seated before some olives and sardines in the restaurant. Mrs. Schilizzi asked Grenville where he had been during the morning. He described the course of his walk, and the spot where he had stood meditating. The tone of his voice was as careless as tone could be; but a look in her eyes told him his

words meant much to her. Mr. Schilizzi, it appeared, had devoted the same period to billiards, and announced that in the afternoon he was going with his friends to the racing stables. He had found out all about them, and proposed that his wife should accompany him. Watching the pair, Grenville was struck by two things—first, that this proposal on his part was a mere concession to civility, made without any wish or expectation that she would accept it; secondly, that she received it with an expression of weary aversion, and was on the point of returning to it some contemptuous answer. The next moment he saw that she controlled the feelings uppermost in her, and forced an acquiescent smile. “As you know, Paul,” she said, “I don’t care much about horses; but still, if you wish it, I shall be very happy to come.”

“You will be, will you,” said her husband. “Then all I can say is, that a minute ago you certainly didn’t look it.”

Grenville stared at him with a quick and



painful interest. The man's glib voice still had its oily ring ; but again it struck Grenville's ears as if some grit had got into it. It seemed in its rapid movement to rasp and grate ; and the speaker eyed his wife with a look of detecting sharpness, as if he had caught some elusive fault in her, and was impishly delighted with the capture. " My dear," he went on, " will you let us begin smoking ? Mr. Grenville, try one of these cigarettes."

It was Grenville's impulse to refuse, but he had no excuse for doing so ; and he eased his conscience afterwards by paying more than his share of the bill. Mr. Schilizzi meanwhile had turned away from his wife as if it were not worth his while to speak to her further about the drive, contriving, so Grenville felt, to make the dropping of his proposal an affront to her even greater than the annoyance he would have caused by insisting on it. Grenville hardly dared to look at her, he felt the situation so painful. He did, however, catch her eyes for a moment, and he



saw they were moist with many conflicting feelings.

"Paul," she said, rising, "I am going up to the children. As you don't seem to want me really, I will sit with them somewhere in the gardens; but if you do, I am quite ready to go."

"No," he replied, with a sneer which ensconced itself in the corners of a smile; "I think, my dear, I can get on without you. Mr. Grenville and I will finish our coffee here."

As she went out, Grenville opened the door for her. "Bobby," she murmured to him sadly, "come to us this afternoon in the gardens."

He and Mr. Schilizzi sat together for a little longer; and he was pleased to find that, without giving any offence, he was able to make impossible even the first beginnings of intimacy. He was indeed pleased to detect, or at least to imagine, a certain contempt for him in his companion's tone, who said as they separated, "I fancy, Mr. Grenville, that

you care for racing almost as little as my wife does."

Mr. Schilizzi was absent till nearly dinner-time. For a couple of tranquil hours Grenville sat in the garden with Mrs. Schilizzi and her children. He and she hardly exchanged a sentence which would, if written down, have hinted to any one that they were lovers; but a sympathy saddened and deepened by the consciousness of many unexpressed circumstances breathed in every tone and every look that passed between them; and no event attested by a hundred subpoenaed witnesses could have indicated a union closer and more complete than this which would have baffled the eyes of the most censorious.

Mr. Schilizzi, when they all met again at dinner, had wholly forgotten the temper he had betrayed at breakfast. He was full of prospects, associated mysteriously with horse-flesh, which had blossomed in the course of his afternoon experiences; and his spirits showed themselves in the appreciation he expressed of his dinner, and in the quickness

with which he praised and despatched many glasses of champagne. "Perhaps," he said, as the banquet drew to an end, "you will take my wife, Mr. Grenville, to listen a little to the band. I have one or two matters to settle with a couple of friends, which could not interest either of you." And putting down a handful of money on the table, "Irma," he said, "you and Mr. Grenville must settle the bill together."

Sticking his hat well on one side of his head, and tucking his cane under his arm, he hurried away and left them. Under the same trees where before they had sat together, they sat together once more, silently listening to the music; and they parted hardly knowing how the day had impressed them—whether by its strangeness, its union, or its estrangement.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

SEVERAL days passed like this. Mr. Schilizzi in his normal state was smiling and talkative, with a sort of fawning *bonhomie*; but at intervals, for a moment, some invisible provocation from his wife would turn his smile into a lurking vindictive sneer, and, to Grenville's ears, sharpened his words like needles. But these occasions were rare. The billiard-table and the gay ladies of the café, his sporting friends and their various sporting projects, occupied most of his time, and titillated him into complete satisfaction. As for his wife and Grenville, they daily spent hours together; but they were rarely alone, and they were rarely in any spot where they felt sufficiently at ease for unreserved conversation. Once or

twice in some secluded path, forgetting herself for an instant, she laid her hand on his arm, but as instantly she withdrew it, shrinking to a distance from him. He too once or twice for an instant had been betrayed into some like familiarity; and she had not only shrunk from this, but reproved him for it in an indignant whisper. She seemed to Grenville to be like a moon still shining for him; but a moon that was gradually eclipsing itself behind hazy gathering clouds. Apart, however, from the constraint for which they themselves were responsible, none was due to the action of Mr. Schilizzi. As to what his wife did, he seemed wholly indifferent, except when some incalculable trifle evoked his resentful grin at her.

At last, however, a curious change came over him. Sunday arrived, and though there were few English visitors, a stray English clergyman had organized a service in the reading-room. To this Mr. Schilizzi, for some reason or other, thought it incumbent on him to go; and having discovered that his wife had a new dress with her that pleased him, he

insisted that she should array herself in this, and come with him to astonish the congregation. In the afternoon, when, having discarded his tall hat and his prayer-book, he descended from his bed-room, where he had been napping, to sun himself in front of the café, he saw his wife strolling across the *place* with Grenville. He had often, with perfect apathy, seen her do this before ; but now a curve of vindictiveness at once showed itself on his nostril, and hurrying up to her, he said in a tone that was like a bite, "My dear, the sun is a great deal too warm for you. If you can postpone till dinner your conversation with Mr. Grenville, I'll see myself that you have a walk as soon as it gets cooler."

"It is hot," said Grenville with ready tact. "Mrs. Schilizzi herself was saying so, just as you came up."

"It's not often," he replied, "that her judgment agrees with mine. Come, Irma, come back to your sitting-room. Mr. Grenville, we shall meet at dinner."

At dinner the unpleasantness had completely

passed away ; and Grenville was again left afterwards to listen with Mrs. Schilizzi to the music.

“ Paul,” she said, “ has been in a dreadful temper. He’s been asking me what I mean by making myself so conspicuous with you ; and my arm—do you know, at first I resolved that I wouldn’t tell you—is above the elbow black and blue from his pinching it.”

“ What,” asked Grenville, after an expression of sympathy, “ what is it that has put him out so suddenly ? ”

“ I think I can tell,” she said. “ This dress I have on to-day—it’s a great deal too smart for the place—but it struck him how pretty I look in it ; and he heard, in the hall or somewhere, a Russian Grand Duke admiring me. I knew exactly what passed in his mind ; I have noticed in him the same thing so often. I became at once, for the time, a valuable possession in his eyes, and he was determined to show me off as his own exclusive property. He doesn’t want me himself ; and as long as nobody else does, he never would care if I



lived and died alone; but the moment he is reminded that other people may admire me, he likes to take me about in order that they all may stare at me, but is perfectly furious if I give even a smile to them. 'This afternoon,' she went on, "he waited till the gardens were full, and then he walked me about wherever the crowd was greatest, as if he were a peacock, and as if I were his tail. I was so nervous, for whenever I turned my head, I felt his eyes were on me; and he said 'Who are you looking at?' However, as you see, he is perfectly quiet now; he was angry with me on your account for no reason personal to yourself; and if you will not be out of reach to-morrow morning, before you hear from me, we may perhaps have a pleasanter day than those we have been passing lately. If this is so, you shall have a note by ten o'clock."

She was as good as her word. The note arrived punctually, and the news and the proposal conveyed in it were far beyond Grenville's hopes. Mr. Schilizzi and his boon

companions would be absent the whole day, at a town some thirty miles distant, attending a sale of horses. They had, in fact, started already; and she proposed that Grenville should take her and the children to visit once again the hotel and the hunting-lodge in the forest. They went. They picnic'd in the lodge. The children were wild with happiness, and were allowed, under Fritz's care, to disport themselves for an hour or so in the forest. Grenville and Mrs. Schilizzi were left alone. They had not been alone there since those far-off enchanted days, when the very walls around them had become part of their lives. A sense of those days was filling the room now, like incense from some smouldering censer; the silence was musical with memories; a chasm full of pain and discord suddenly disappeared and closed, and the present made its peace with the past.

"Irma," he said to her, shortly before the return of the others, "do you believe now that I can ever—ever go away from you?"

"I don't know," she answered, looking with

a sad smile at him. "I'm afraid that very often you will be obliged to do so."

"Perhaps if separation can be produced by intervals of miles and days; but I shall never be really parted from you until you desire to part from me."

"Nor I, Bobby, from you. I don't know if I am glad or sorry for it. Tell me this—is there nothing that you feel sorry for? Don't look pained, dear. Is it odd of me to ask you that question? Is not this the best of times to ask it, when I know you can never be angry with me, and when my soul is bare to yours?"

"I wish," he said, "to be honest with you. I will, then, confess this. There is something within me which is always, always asking that I, alone and personally, for all the happiness you give me, may make, by some secret pain, a constant atonement to something."

"Bobby," she said, "my own one—I am doing that already."

"Irma," he exclaimed, "you spoke just now of my being angry with you. Have I been

angry often ? I know I have been sharp and hard to you, and my thoughts have been even harder than my words. I wonder if you can guess why ? Sometimes you seem to take yourself so very far away from me, and I wonder if you were ever near. I know there are reasons for your behaving thus ; but I can't always feel them, and you sometimes take me by surprise. Listen—let me give you this—these few lines, which I wrote one night when I was thinking about you. I see the children outside—read it before they come in.”

She took the paper from him and read—

“Does there seem anger in my voice and glance,  
Ever ? Or worse—mistrust ? If this should be,  
Forgive me, for the dust of circumstance  
Blows in my eyes, and makes them not to see.

“Forgive me, you who every day are dearer !  
I see the breast on which I long to lean,  
So near, yet every star in heaven is nearer,  
And all the winds of twilight sweep between.”

She gave him the paper back with a gentle responsive smile. The children's voices in

the passage prevented any answer; and the veil of common cheerfulness fell once more over both of them. During the drive home, gradually becoming weary, she for one moment leant her cheek on his shoulder; and, with one plaintive look at him, she removed it again so quickly that the act would by any observer have been attributed to the jolting of the carriage.

Mr. Schilizzi returned for dinner that evening. Grenville was struck by his humour, which was curiously sharp and taciturn, and set it down to some annoyance connected probably with horses. But this explanation seemed hardly to account for the fact that when dinner was over he stuck to his wife's side for nearly an hour at the band, and only left her with Grenville just as the performance was ending, and did even this only so as to exchange a word with a friend.

"He," said Mrs. Schilizzi, the moment he was out of hearing, "he is furious again with me. I told him I had been for a drive with you. He stamped, and grinned, and swore

at me. I thought for the moment he was going to knock me down."

"What has made him like this?" Grenville asked hurriedly. "Has he lost some money, or has anything else annoyed him?"

"No," she said, "it's jealousy. He's beginning to think I like you."

"Do you think it would really pain him to know you did?"

"Pain is the wrong word. It would, I believe, infuriate him. It is odd that it should be so, as he cares nothing for me. Nothing could annoy him more than my affection for him, unless it were my affection for somebody else. See—he is coming. Good-night. How pretty that last waltz was!"

He watched her as she left him and walked away with her husband. "What a horrible thing," he thought, "that law, custom, or anything should give this brute the remnant of a right to feel thus." He had seen Mr. Schilizzi before she had—seen him taking his leave of that very lady the charm of whose figure had so commended itself to his taste in

the gardens. Grenville had never till now allowed himself, even in thought, to speak violently of Mr. Schilizzi. He had felt it a point of honour to restrain or repress his judgments of him. But now that face which, from the first moment he had seen it, he had never seen without aversion, presented itself to his mind with an importunate and repulsive vividness; and things which he had hardly noticed began to impress themselves on his mind—the unwholesome tinge of yellow which had come into the dark complexion, the tightening of the skin about the eyes, telling its tale of dissipation, and the animal curves taken by the plausible restless lips.



## CHAPTER XXIX.

GRENVILLE went to bed that night hardly knowing what to expect. Early next morning he received the following note—

“Paul and I are going to-day for an expedition—to the place where he went yesterday, and on the same business. The same thing may possibly happen to-morrow. Dine with us as usual. We shall naturally be charmed to see you.”

The first thing that struck him on reading this was her use of the word “we,” identifying herself with her husband; the next was the blankness of the prospect that thus opened up before him. One whole day, and very probably two, had had in an instant everything sponged out of them, except the burden

of so many intolerable hours. He found this burden greater than even his fears had anticipated; and the worst came to the worst; there actually were two days of it. Even the meeting at dinner, which he longed for from early morning, desiring it like a water-brook in the desert, when it came was an aggravation of his pain. Mr. Schilizzi to him was glib and civil as ever; but as for her, instead of being civilly distant, and softening her distance now and then with a smile—instead of behaving thus, which he was already prepared for—she treated him in a way which struck him as gratuitously repelling. She affected complete indifference to any topic he started, and if ever she noticed his opinions, it was either to question or to contradict them.

For the first night he bore this without even a mental murmur; though when after dinner she refused to listen to the band, declaring that music bored her, and that she was going to rest on her sofa, he felt in his heart the movement of bewildered bitterness.

But the second night, when all these experiences were repeated, when on meeting him at dinner her voice had no tone of welcome, when her eyes never forgot themselves in a single relenting look, and when she not only contradicted any opinion he expressed, but actually seemed to resent it from the very fact of its being his, though he struggled to think that she was still doing violence to her wishes, his powers of belief grew restive under the growing strain that was put upon them, and at last refused any longer to supply him with this difficult comfort. His own manner underwent a complete though subtle change. He did not for a moment become discourteous or even brusque. On the contrary, his conversation became what a stranger would have thought brighter. But his remarks glittered, and their points took an added sharpness, because by a silent process they froze and crystallized into cynicism.

This had one result which was entirely unexpected. Mr. Schilizzi, without knowing why, found himself thinking Grenville a really

pleasant companion, and began, as he finished his fifth glass of champagne, to show his appreciation by a variety of vivacious innuendoes, the meaning of which was generally illuminated by a wink. At last, as he looked round the restaurant at the end of one of these sallies, Grenville noticed that his eyes suddenly fixed themselves. He noticed also what the object was which had arrested them: it was the lady with the fascinating figure. As for her character, there could be no doubt about it—though it was one which with charitable irony the world would describe as doubtful; and Grenville felt as certain as if the whole story had been confessed to him, that she and Mr. Schilizzi were already on the best of terms with each other. Presently she swept by, fanning herself, and diffusing zephyrs of patchouli; and as she went Mr. Schilizzi's travelling eye followed her movements between eyelids almost closed. Then for five minutes he seemed unnaturally interested in his dessert. He peeled a pear for his wife, and talked to her with persistent

attention. Then he looked at his watch, and exclaimed with a most creditable start, "By Gad, Irma, I wonder if you know what time it is? I must hurry off instantly to meet Schwabe and Silbersheim. What will you do?"

He looked doubtful, and frowned for a moment.

"Hang it all!" he said, "You'd better wait at the band for me; and Mr. Grenville will see that nobody comes and eats you. Suppose we ask him whether he thinks you'd be tender."

Grenville and Mrs. Schilizzi once again were alone together; but a few conventional words about the music and the warmth of the evening were all that for some minutes they found themselves able to utter, and their tone in doing so was one of polite indifference. She was the first to inaugurate any change; and the change, when she did so, was from indifference to actual hardness.

"The music," she said, "interests you as

little as it does me. If you meet my husband, will you tell him I have gone in?"

As she spoke she half rose to go; but with an exclamation, violent although under his breath, Grenville stopped her.

"If you go," he said, "I conclude you will go for ever. I myself shall leave Lichtenbourg to-morrow."

She looked at him, not with kindness, but still with a start of quick involuntary alarm.

"What," he went on more gently, "what is the use of my remaining here, if all day long I am never to have a sight of you, and when we meet you resent every word I utter?"

"Have you," she retorted, "no sense of my position—none—absolutely none?"

"Indeed," he said gently, "I have every sense. Surely you might trust me not to distress or embarrass you?"

"Stop, stop!" she exclaimed. "Don't go on talking about it; if you do I shall scream. Can't you let me alone? Well—to-morrow

I'm going no more expeditions; you may, if you like, meet me in the gardens at eleven. Bobby, you must come. You don't know how all this is killing me. I have to go in now, I'm so tired. Good-bye till to-morrow; and then, if you can, tell me you don't quite hate me."

Her strange changes of feeling struck him differently at different times. Sometimes they seemed the result of some deep but troubled principle, trying pathetically to adjust itself to the stress of untried circumstances; though it was a principle to which as yet he had found no complete clue. Sometimes they seemed the caprices of mere emotional selfishness. But to-night he retired to rest convinced at least of one thing, that, despite whatever it cost her, she was still true to him. When he came to meet her in the garden, she was there before her time; but he was conscious of a momentary annoyance at seeing that she had brought her children. As soon, however, as he sat down by her, she told them to go and play; and then, mindful of



her last words at parting, he murmured to her timidly some phrase of affection.

Her answer was a new surprise to him. He could hardly believe his ears. Averting her head, with a concentrated repulse in her accent, "Don't," she exclaimed, "don't say a word of that kind. Don't touch me; don't come near me; don't say a syllable that may even suggest that you are fond of me."

In faltering, bewildered sentences, he asked her what was her meaning.

"Last night I was ill," she said. "I hardly could sleep at all; and I lay awake hating myself more and more, till the morning. If I go on seeing you much, I believe I shall have brain-fever. Why don't you go away? It's unkind of you staying on here. I wish you'd go, and then perhaps I shall be at peace again."

"Go?" exclaimed Grenville. "Do you really wish me to go?"

He stared at her. She said, "Yes."

"Then I will," he answered quietly. "I will go this afternoon."

He could hardly believe even now that she would take him at his word; but in a slow, low voice she said,

“I think it would be better. Of course if it is inconvenient to you, you could put it off till to-morrow. Paul is unwell this morning. He’s in bed with a chill or something, so as far as he is concerned, your presence would make no matter.” Then after a moment or two, with a little quiver of her lips, “I don’t want you to go,” she said. “I suppose I don’t know quite what I do want. And yet, yes—I do know. . Go—and go to-day.”

“And for how long?” he asked. “Do you mean for ever?”

“Oh,” she said irritably, “don’t trouble me with questions. No—not for ever. Surely you can go to the Pasha’s, and when I want you again, I can write and tell you. When you come back, we may be able to make things different.”

“Very well, Irma. And will you be happy without me?”

"I shall have you again by and by," she said more calmly. "And we may be able to put things then on a different plane. You know what I mean. I need not speak more clearly."

"You speak of that, Irma, as if it were very easy. I didn't know that human nature was so simple."

"Perhaps," she said, "women and men are different. I think it would be easy for a woman."

The words were few, but they sufficed to astound Grenville. Why this should be so he at the time hardly knew; but he was conscious of a shock that set all his thoughts reeling. He tried to answer her; but at first he could command no words. He rose abruptly, and in silence held out his hand to her. She merely looked gravely at him.

"Low as my plane is," he said at last, "will not you stoop to it even to say good-bye? I am going to make my preparations. I shall not be here to-night."

"Where are you going?" she asked.

“To the Pasha’s, if I find he will have me. I shall send Fritz with a note. If he won’t have me, I will go back to the Princess. I will keep out of your way till I have gone; and I shall not return, or trouble you with letters, till you write to me.”

He raised his hat, turned on his heel, and went. He sent his note; but whilst waiting for his servant’s return, he hardly knew in his distraction what to do with himself. He resolved on a long walk. But what walk should he take? Every road he knew was haunted with memories of Irma; and “sorrow’s crown of sorrow” would be hanging on every tree. He did at last, however, hit on an unknown route—a path that led him away into some ragged tracts of wood; and sitting on a prostrate trunk, he brooded in restless bitterness. What the pain at his heart was, was still partly a mystery to him. Was this, he asked himself, to be the end of all that love, for the sake of which he had surrendered everything, and in a moral as well as in a material sense, taken his life in

his hand? Was this to be its ignominious end? A picture confronted him of his possible ghastly folly; but the pain that was now tormenting him could not be explained by this. There was something else, something worse, below the surface, churning the waters of his misery. At last he realized what it was; it was the following thought.

She had said it would be easy to her to alter the character of their relations. What pained him was not the thought that she should wish to alter it, nor even that she would find it easy to do so; but the thought of the new light which, if to alter it were so easy, would be thrown on her character in having ever yielded to it. Her self-surrender to him had been hitherto in his eyes transfigured, redeemed, and glorified by what he believed to be its intensity and its completeness. It represented to him some overwhelming need of her nature—some profound movement of her soul. But now, even supposing he regarded her conduct as a sin, the ease with which she said she would amend it, instead of making him think

any better of her future, forced him to think incalculably worse of her past. If she could go back so lightly to the paths of technical virtue, how much more lightly, how contemptibly, she must have acted in ever leaving them. Terms came into his mind, offering themselves as suitable to such a woman, the very thought of which he winced at, and which his will would not suffer to be applied. Little by little his feelings found an outlet which to many natures no doubt may seem false and artificial, but which to a man of his temperament is absolutely natural and spontaneous. His wretchedness began to express itself in rhyme and rhythm; and these brought to him the same sort of relief that a cry or a groan brings to one suffering physical torture. He wrote the verses down in pencil on a torn envelope, and again and again read them. They were these—

“The world was bright with many a prize,  
Of power and pride for me.  
I looked at thee with dreaming eyes,  
And left the world for thee.



With wakened eyes, with eyes bereft  
Of dreams, I see thee now.  
The emptiest prize I spurned and left  
Was not so vain as thou.

I will go back to power and pride !  
Ah no ! too late I see  
That all the world is dross beside  
My broken dream of thee."

Heavy at heart, and moving like a man wounded, he dragged himself slowly, after an hour or two, back to Lichtenbourg. Even in his wretchedness one thing delighted him. He saw Fritz at the hotel door, with a carriage and with luggage in readiness. He knew, therefore, even before an effusive note was handed to him, that the Pasha would be delighted to welcome him, and without a moment's delay he took his seat and departed. He was a prey during the journey to two alternate impulses—the one, an impulse to complete his accusation and conviction of her, and so far as possible to shake himself free of her memory ; the other the impulse to justify her, and explain her conduct by attributing it



to something too high for his comprehension. He struggled to imagine himself living happy without her. He said to himself that the world had other women as charming; and in especial he bethought him of the eyes and figure of Miss Markham. But he had hardly consented to harbour this last image, when he drove it away in disgust and repentant sorrow; and mentally abasing himself at the feet of Mrs. Schilizzi, confessed and asked pardon for this act of despairing treachery. This mood was hardly less painful than the other, but it was a mood which braced him with a sense of self-respect.

“Whatever, Irma,” he murmured, “may be thought of my devotion for you, I will shame the most saintly lover that ever lived by its fidelity.”

Gradually his thoughts once again began to shape themselves into verse, which gave him some satisfaction by its sympathetic cadence; and at last, producing a note-book, he scribbled down these lines—

“ You may if you will, till I die, leave me friendless ;  
But I still shall go dreaming aloof and alone,  
That at last, in the life or the sleep that is endless,  
I shall breathe on your bosom, for ever your own.”

No verses, however, not a whole volume of them, could have eased his breast of the physical pain oppressing it, or have made him, by the time he reached the Pasha's castle, able to meet the world with anything but distaste and weariness.

The guests since he was there last had neither increased nor diminished in number. So far as he had considered the matter, he had secretly hoped they might have increased ; for new faces would at any rate be a sort of distraction ; and the more people there were present, the fewer he would have to talk to. But the Pasha, with Lady Ashford, the Baroness, and Miss Markham, formed just such a party as would compel him to exert himself, or make him, if he failed to do so, seem either rude or peculiar. Lady Ashford indeed, by whom he sat at dinner, did, after asking him many questions about his prospects,

and lightly remarking, "I suppose you have not yet found your affinity," actually add, "Mr. Grenville, tell me what's come to you? you seem quite to have lost your spirits. Have you found your affinity after all?"

"If I had," he said laughing, "I should have found my spirits, not lost them. I have not been very well," he went on, feeling bound to offer some explanation, "and the stomach affects the spirits quite as much as the heart does. I'm afraid after this wonderful dinner it will treat me worse than ever, unless you distract me, as you are sure to do, from our host's truffles and *foies gras*."

"His plates interest me," said Lady Ashford, "so much more than his *plats*." And then conversation, to Grenville's relief, flowed into a safe channel. The plates were Sèvres, superb in colour and gilding—they formed an excellent subject of small-talk; so did the fruit dishes and other ornaments of the table, including a gold fountain which sputtered scent in the middle; so did the collection of huge gilded salvers, which gleamed on a

side-board like so many harvest moons. The servants too attracted Grenville's quick social observation—especially the footmen, whose stockings were as red as sealing-wax, and two Oriental attendants, in turbans and loose trousers.

In the evening they all of them played billiards. The jewelled scimitars made flashing fireworks on the walls. The two Oriental figures appeared every ten minutes, with superfluous repetitions of Turkish coffee and liqueurs. The aroma of cigarettes went through the air pungently. Every one smoked but Lady Ashford. The Baroness puffed like the chimney of a small steam-engine; and Miss Markham's lips, with a slow and dainty softness, emitted a mist of silver from between their fastidious coral.

Grenville's part in the scene was little more than mechanical. He was just conscious that now and then Miss Markham seemed bent on showing him, not only the beauty of her play, but that of arms and wrists. He knew that people spoke to him. He knew that he

answered when he was spoken to, and that he tried to make conversation. But of what he said he was only half conscious; his own voice made no sound in his ears; and the voices of the others were merely like faint noises in a dream. The Pasha, when the ladies retired, suggested that he should come to the smoking-room; but on plea of fatigue he excused himself, longing to be again alone—alone, so as to drop the smothering mask of gaiety, to groan if he pleased instead of forcing laughter; and, if he could, to lose himself in the peace of sleep, hoping that to-morrow might bring him some note from Lichtenbourg.

He little knew how strong his hope was, till the post arrived without a line for himself, and killed it. He imagined that he had expected this. He imagined that he was prepared for it; but when the disappointment came, it struck him like some treacherous blow. "How can a woman be so cruel?" he exclaimed to himself; and, smarting under this thought, his nature swerved in revolt from

her, struggling to recover its independence. This was in the morning, an hour before the mid-day breakfast; and, during this hour, as he sat alone in his room, he found that his mind, with a kind of defiant longing, was looking forward to again meeting Miss Markham. Even to think of Mrs. Schilizzi had suddenly become so painful that, as a man whose clothes are on fire might plunge instinctively into water, he felt himself instinctively impelled to soothe himself by some distraction. Such being the case, Miss Markham's various fascinations, which he was hitherto hardly aware that he had noticed, or which, if they had occurred to him, he had pushed contemptuously out of his consciousness, suddenly now came back to him, and he let his imagination dwell on them. How would she be dressed?—for her dresses were always changing. How would she look at him through her long dark lashes? How would her lips, like a parted rose-bud, speak to him? What hat would she wear? What would be the colour of her gloves? With what shoes



would she emphasize the arch of her dainty instep?

He was conscious of a miserable and perverse impatience to see her again; and he found himself entering the hall—the usual place of meeting—a good ten minutes too early. The masses of furniture bewildered his eyes at first; and considering what the time was, he concluded the room was empty. But a coloured something moved against a background of screens and cabinets, and he realized that this actually was Miss Markham herself. She was sitting, when he caught sight of her, in a huge Florentine chair. She had apparently been out of doors, for a dainty little hat was on her forehead, a jacket clipped her figure, and a delicate gloved hand indolently held a walking-stick. With the other she was pressing a pocket-handkerchief to her nostrils, seeming to find in its folds the subject of profound meditation. She did not stir when he entered, but with the magnetism of a quiet good-morning drew him towards her, and holding the handkerchief out to him, said,



"Do you like this scent? Just smell it, and tell me."

"It's odd," he said. "What in the world is it?"

Miss Markham laughed. "Goodness knows," she said, "I don't. It's supposed to be worth ten guineas a bottle. Our host gave it me. Have you," she went on with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes, "have you seen the bottles in his bed-room? He is well able to spare it."

"I am not sure," said Grenville, "that I like it."

"I," said Miss Markham, speaking with a sort of velvety dryness, and employing a word which is hardly elegant in itself, but which came from her lips as if modelled in Dresden china, "I think it's *beastly*. Here, Mr. Grenville, I wish you'd take my handkerchief. Will you? I'll make you a present of it."

"I confess," replied Grenville, "it's hardly a flattering present."

"I hope," she said, "that at any rate you will dislike it less than I do. It makes me

think of the Pasha. It will make you think of me. We're going to drive afterwards," she continued, "so I shall not take off my hat ; but my gloves have so many buttons I may as well begin undoing them. Help me. There's no one coming. I've been out. I delight in walking."

Whatever Miss Markham was good at, she was not good at prophecy, for at this moment Lady Ashford and the Baroness entered ; and Grenville was struck by the oddly different way in which, as it seemed to him, these two ladies greeted him. Seeing him as they did, standing close to Miss Markham, Lady Ashford, he thought, showed symptoms of marked pleasure ; whilst every wrinkle latent in the face of the Baroness appeared to twitch with equally marked annoyance. The Pasha, however, entered, rubbing his jewelled hands, and every expression at once naturally changed itself. As if by magic a series of folding doors were flung open and the party went in to breakfast ; but not even the breakfast, beginning with the choicest caviare and ending with bon-bons

fresh from the artist's hand, could medicine the face of the Baroness to its usual sinister complacency.

Struggling as he was for spirits, and half interested as he was in Miss Markham, Grenville still was conscious of a burning smart within him, and would still have been absent-minded, if his curiosity had not been roused by the bearing of those two elder ladies. In the course of the afternoon it was more or less satisfied. The object of their drive was the identical old castle which he had first heard of at the Princess's, and visited on his first morning at Lichtenbourg. Here, for a certain time, he found himself alone with Lady Ashford; and he felt convinced from what she said, though she did not speak very plainly, that the Baroness, who was entirely under the influence of the King of Moldavia, was anxious to promote the intimacy between him and Miss Markham; whilst Lady Ashford believed the King's caprice to be evaporating, but was staying with the Pasha, and probably outstaying her welcome, in

order to offer her niece any protection that might be necessary.

"Can't you," asked Grenville, "take her back to England? Has she no mother or father to take care of her or keep her in order?"

"No," said Lady Ashford, "that's the worst of it. She's of age—she's just of age; and is, unfortunately, her own mistress. She has money too, and a most determined will of her own. If her family put her back up by any injudicious handling, she is capable of doing anything, and of snapping her fingers at the consequences. And yet," Lady Ashford continued, changing her tone, "she has the makings in her of really a fine character." Grenville did not believe this: he, however, forbore to say so. "Do you remember," said Lady Ashford, "how much you admired her at the Embassy? And she, too, was curiously taken with you. Have you forgotten our conversation that night, and some bits of philosophy I told you?" Grenville replied that he had not forgotten a word. "You

may remember then," she went on, "my telling you that the woman who can love most deeply will never love her deepest till first she has loved in vain—that she only learns what she wants to give and get by finding out how much one man can neither understand nor give. Well—I believe, since I said that to you, Juanita Markham has been finding out the truth of it."

She added more in something the same strain, till a dim suspicion at last dawned on his mind of its being Lady Ashford's hope that he might, in Miss Markham's affections, be willing to seize on the throne which the monarch was preparing to abdicate. To entertain such an idea in any serious sense never for an instant occurred to him; but the belief that Lady Ashford entertained it, to a certain degree flattered him, and gave a fresh impulse to the bitter recklessness of his mood. A sort of spurious good spirits came to him as they drove back, and without hesitation he complied with his host's proposal that they should enjoy before dinner a private cigarette in the smoking-room.

In doing this Grenville was doing a real work of charity. The Pasha's experiences and opinions were so wide and so comprehensive, that there were only a few of them which, with all his happy audacity, he was able except in confidence to communicate frankly to ladies. He often therefore earnestly desired a man, to whom he might unbosom the exuberant riches of his nature; and Grenville presently found how sincerely his presence was appreciated. The Pasha, unlike many meaner conversationalists, made no effort at anything indecorous. No effort was needed. His conversation flowed easily like a sunny and babbling stream; nor had he any narrow contempt for jokes or anecdotes that were innocent. He was never bitter; he was constantly humorous; and although there was nothing on which he shrank from expatiating, his language was never coarse, because nothing seemed coarse to him. He touched pitch without the smallest fear of defilement. The generalization at which he arrived finally was this—that no attachment



was ever Platonic at its beginning. "No, no, no," he laughed. "You English are purists; and if you only saw things as they are, you would be delighted with what I say. What can be better? Love is an upward progress—an ascent towards the divine, not a descent from it. Your Platonic affection—you can always have that afterwards. Consider you now our esteemed friend the Baroness. We may speak of her history freely, for all the world is acquainted with it. With the King of Moldavia now she is absolutely—absolutely Platonic, and—how do you English phrase it?—unselfishly devoted to his interests. Good!—but then of course she was *au mieux* with him to begin with. You understand? You see my meaning?" said the Pasha, extending his forefinger, and screwing up his eyes in triumph, like a statesman confiding some astute consideration of policy.

To Grenville these chance words were a revelation, though hardly a surprise. The history which, according to the Pasha, all the world was acquainted with, he had never



heard before ; and it turned into a certainty what before was a surmise merely—that the Baroness was the King's accomplice.

In any other mood the whole situation would have revolted him. He would have been revolted by the sense of being himself connected with it. But just as physical pain of one kind may make a man insensible to others, so the mental pain which still burnt under the surface made Grenville insensible to what otherwise would have caused in him a moral nausea. His aim was not to think. His aim was to escape from thought ; and again he turned at dinner for distraction to Miss Markham. He began to be conscious of a new sort of attraction in her. That she was good, or refined, or elevated, he never for a moment thought. He could not even pity her as the object of the machinations of the Baroness ; but all the same she interested him as being in some ways a riddle. Her manner was refined, though he never believed she was. There was a dainty quiet in it. Her sense of humour was keen, but com-

pletely under control ; and when it lit up her face it struck him all the more from her eyes being in general soft and almost sombre with melancholy. "What," he asked himself, "does she think of her king? Does she feel his desertion? Is she capable of feeling anything? And yet, whatever she is, that girl is in one way genuine. She has the courage of her own desires; and the world will never interfere with her. She looks," he thought presently, as he let his eye rest on her, "preoccupied as to how she can best go to the devil."

After dinner she affected him still more powerfully; though in yielding to her influence he felt like a man throwing himself into the sea. She sang. He remembered her voice as he had heard it at the Embassy. It penetrated, it thrilled through him now, as it never had done then. Its liquid tones seemed to vibrate with a passion committed to a music which was but another form of itself. Some music suggests a rising in the air. Hers suggested to Grenville a fathomless sinking in the sea. "Let me live my

life out!" He instinctively put these words to it as a kind of mental libretto. "Let me live my life out, no matter how soon, but completely; and then, let the mountains fall on me, let the rocks cover me!" He shuddered as he listened: he felt that the effect on him was horrible; yet he moved to the piano, and stood by the singer fascinated. When she had finished he begged her to sing again; but looking up to him with a faint provoking smile, "No," she said, "I am tired. These windows open on a kind of platform or balcony: I am going out to get my breath in the moonlight." He opened the window for her, and they went out together. He felt as he did so as if his good angel was deserting him. She came close to his side, and leaned with him over the parapet. "How cool," she said, "and how restful. These shadows are soft like swan's-down." She turned her eyes to his. They seemed to him now like jewels, now like nocturnal flowers with dew on them. Before many minutes had passed, the girl, quietly mistress of the

situation, was holding his hand in hers. He had yielded to the magic of her touch; and yet, deep in his heart he felt there had been plunged a dagger. But his heart appeared to him hopelessly far away, disappearing out of sight in some dark depth of his being. At this moment, whatever had become of his good angel, a bad one appeared, who performed a good one's function. It was the Baroness, who said they were wanted to play billiards. Grenville at all events had no need to be told twice; and, by and by, when he found himself alone in his room, his mind was racked by one and one only hope—that the following day a letter might come to him from Lichtenbourg.

The day came, and the hour of the post's arrival. As he waited for it, yesterday, and Miss Markham, and every interest relating to her, were all forgotten by him in a mental meeting of extremes—intense and breathless hope, and anticipated despair. Fritz entered his room with a letter. Grenville's heart beat violently. He seized the letter. It was a bill.

There was nothing else for him. Helpless misery descended on his heart like an avalanche. Then again, as before, his miserable heart rebelled, and its forces mustered themselves like those of the fallen angels.

Blankly staring from the window at the gardens and woods below, he saw in a winding walk a glimpse of Miss Markham's parasol. It was red. It reminded him of another of the same colour; and with a bitter ejaculation, for a moment he turned away. Presently he went back to the window. What he looked for still was visible. He seized his hat. He descended to the garden, and met her. Her eyes brightened when she saw him, and the light in them softly trembled under their shadowy lashes. She was not a great talker. She spoke of the air, and of the flowers, of which last she knew really a good deal, but which she seemed to value for their scent rather than for their colour, except in so far as their colour might be suitable to her own complexion. She made him pick her a rose. "Pin it," she said, "in my

jacket for me." She fixed her eyes on him as she spoke ; and whilst he obeyed her order, she very patiently dropped them. " I wish," she said, " we had not to go in to breakfast."

In the afternoon they rode together, though the Baroness opposed the arrangement, severely condemning its impropriety. But the Pasha informed her that such things were done in England. Lady Ashford confirmed the statement, and so there was no more to be said. In the evening there was again music ; and though there was no retirement on the balcony, Miss Markham had the art of producing moments of privacy in a well-lit room where several other people were present. Gradually Grenville felt that her presence was acting on him like some narcotic, lulling the pains and doubts that were aching within him secretly. He slept better the next two nights ; and though, when on the arrival of the post, he was wounded afresh each morning by finding that he had no letter, he felt that the personality of the woman near him was softly shielding his eyes from the



vision of the woman absent. And yet to the woman near him he yielded himself grudgingly and slowly. He was never conscious of uttering one genuine thought to her. The thoughts which he did utter were mere guests in his mind, and most of them were not honoured guests. Still she had triumphed so far as to keep him constantly at her side ; and his thoughts, it may perhaps be conjectured, were the last things she cared about. They were for her no part of the intimacy — they were little more than its coverlet.

The second of these two mornings she contrived a new stroke of generalship. Amongst other accomplishments she possessed that of drawing ; and, instead of alluring him to meet her before breakfast in the gardens, she told him of a sitting-room, with a view, in one of the towers, and there she informed him she was going to attempt a sketch. He acted on the hint conveyed to him. He went with her to the room indicated ; he helped her with her paints and pencils ; but despite



his assistance an hour passed away, and a few outlines were all that the paper had to show for it. So far as Grenville was concerned, many men would consider that he had done little during that time for which he could reasonably reproach himself; but at all events there had happened the following incident. By accident or design a miniature diamond brooch which held Miss Markham's dress round her slim throat became unfastened. "Fasten it for me," she said, with a little pout of her lips. She stood up before him, her eyes resting unflinchingly upon his; and the next moment, with a melancholy deliberate languor, her lips had attracted his to them as if they had been some magnet. To Grenville's intense relief, from far with a faint hoarseness, at this juncture sounded the gong for breakfast.

She suggested that in the afternoon they should again seek their retirement, adroitly letting him know that they could do so without being observed. He met her at the foot of a certain winding stair, and by it they reached

a landing out of which the room opened. The landing, however, was ill lit; and it happened that in the dusk, out of several dingy doors Miss Markham went to the wrong one. Grenville followed her, and found himself in the very room—the bare room with the antiquated rude furniture—where he and Mrs. Schilizzi had had their meal together.

He started, and stood absolutely still. Miss Markham had withdrawn instantly, saying, “Our room is the next one,” and had gone to it, expecting that he would follow. But for a minute or so he could not move. That empty room appeared to him like the tomb of all the hopes of his life—of everything that was beautiful or sacred in it. He did not dare to advance beyond the threshold; but the voice of Irma spoke in the dusty air, and he saw her eyes full of dreams and aspirations. He closed the door reverently; he pressed his hand to his forehead. When he rejoined Miss Markham she saw him a changed man. He little knew how the change betrayed itself in his

face. It could have escaped the attention of no one; but the cause of it was naturally unsuspected by her.

“Are you ill?” she said. “Are you suffering?”

He caught at the suggestion eagerly. “It’s nothing,” he said. “It’s merely a sudden headache. I can hardly see. I must go to my room and be quiet. I shall be all right in an hour or two.”

Miss Markham’s face, like his, exhibited genuine feeling; but hers suggested annoyance far more than sorrow. When he closed the door she sullenly collected her materials. She sat with them lying in her lap, her dainty lips pouting; and presently, undoing a button, she drew from her breast a locket. There was a man’s portrait on one side and on the other a crown in diamonds. She looked long at it with a half-discontented smile.

## CHAPTER XXX.

GRENVILLE meanwhile had secured for himself at least one luxury—solitude. The emotions of men and women show themselves in different ways. A woman suffering as he did would have cried or broken down somehow. He at first did nothing but sink into a chair by his writing-table, bite his lips, and listen to a sigh which he could not suppress, and which only quivered under his vain attempts to do so. He then took up a copy of an English newspaper, and with apparent interest began to glance over its columns. But in a moment or two he dashed it down, and a frown furrowed itself on his forehead. Lying on his table was his diary. He had written nothing in it for days. He now

opened it, and hastily seized a pen ; and the paper was soon creaking under its quick vindictive strokes. "I feel," he muttered to himself, "as if my ink ought to be vitriol."

"I don't know," he began, "if hell is a real place ; but if it is, I know the nature of its torments ; for during the last three days I have suffered them. They have nothing to do with hot tongs, or the fire-place. The fire and the burning iron are supplied by one's own soul. They consist of the sense of sin, together with the constant commission of it—and sin is the act of being separated from one's true self ; and also from that to which one's true self is devoted. If we were separated from this once for all, if one's belief in its value once for all died, then one might be at peace ; but in hell this belief is always coming to life again, only that one may feel the torture of again making oneself unfit for it. It is a never-dying, ever-reviving death. This sounds like a fragment from some book of theology. It is really the literal confession of an ordinary man of the world, whose thoughts are busy

immediately not with God, but a woman—and a woman whom, according to theologians, he has no business to love. But with an extraordinary fidelity this secular experience of mine embodies what theologians say. To me this woman represents everything that is good—everything that is high and beautiful; and knowingly and deliberately I have estranged myself from her, committing against her daily acts of treachery. And my will has consented. But here is the strange thing:—it has, as it were, consented against my will; and whenever this has happened—what monkish specialist will lend me an image savage enough?—a red-hot knife has gone through the tissues of my soul, cutting away from me all that in myself I respected, and leaving my life dead. Now for the first time in its fulness I know what guilt means. I remember a certain morning when I thought for a time I knew it. I thought I was convicted by my own conscience and abased before it. I know better now. What menaced me on that occasion, as if it were a sense of guilt, was really terror or

distrust of an untried situation. For so far as this woman is concerned, I was absolutely true, absolutely single-hearted; and for the first time in my life I was beginning to realize what absolute devotion to another human being meant. Theologians and moralists may say of me what they like; but I swear by all that they think sacred, that a new inward light was that morning dawning on me. But now, if that light is darkness, how great the darkness is!

"Irma," he continued, "I know that you have been strange and hard to me. You have tried me. But what of that? What must I be worth, if I could not bear such trials? How often have I said to you that I longed to suffer for you; and here at the first acute suffering I fall away! And yet—— Why have you left me without a single word? Are you going to take your own way to heaven, without so much as saying one good-bye to me?"

Here his pen arrested itself. Seizing a piece of blotting-paper, he placed it on the page,



and abruptly shut up the book; and having reflected for a few moments, he set himself to write a letter. It had no formal beginning. It ran thus—

“I want your opinion on a certain piece of writing, and I hope you will be good enough to read it through patiently. It is a communication from a man to a woman, made under circumstances which are sufficiently explained by what he says; and I want you to tell me, if you will, how you think it would affect a woman receiving it. Is there anything in it that would touch her, or appeal to her, or soften her heart towards the writer, if, having cared for him, she had subsequently driven him away from her? It runs as follows; I copy it out at length:—

“If you feel that your relationship with me sets you at variance with yourself, or lowers you in your own eyes, or destroys your peace, I will not ask you to let me again come near you. But I will ask you one thing, both for your sake and mine. In cutting yourself off from the past that we have shared

together, even while you condemn it, be just to it.

“As for your own heart you can speak better than I can. What I want to do is to tell you about mine; for I can tell you about it some things which perhaps you hardly realize, and which will not only make you (so I venture to hope) think more kindly of me, but will also prevent your thinking too hardly of yourself. I want to lay bare to you all that I have become, and been, and am, so far as my life has relation to your own; and if in this you see anything that is good and true, I ask you not only to relent a little towards myself, but to remember that this truth and goodness is due to your influence, and is a reflection of your own nature.

“Well—as to truth, is not a man's truth to a woman shown by what he sacrifices in order to live true to her? Listen to this then. For your sake I have sacrificed everything. As to worldly advantages, I have retained only enough of them to keep me in such circumstances as admit of my being your

companion. Forgive me for alluding to this. You know it. But I doubt if you do know how completely, in other matters, I have made a parallel sacrifice. I have made myself, for your sake, friendless except for you. I don't say that I did this voluntarily, but it has been the natural result of the affection with which you have filled me. Every one else has grown to me strange and distant. No—not every one. There are a few old friends, to whom still I could naturally have talked with confidence; but since I have known you, I have never done so. I have been filled with a sense that any intimate thought of mine should be revealed to you only, and shared with you only. I have made myself for your sake, except for you, altogether alone. Whilst you remained with me, you more than made up to me for everything; but now that you have left me, I know how complete my loneliness is. Believe me, I am not exaggerating. Over every throb of my pulse, over every thought, over every look, I have kept watch, so that everything which is worthy

in me might belong entirely to you ; and all that was unworthy shrivelled away and disappeared. For your sake all my sense of aspiration revived ; my intellectual interests became keen again. Why do I talk ? You know it. Ask your memory.

“ And now comes my question. Answer it. Am I so degraded and vile, that I am not fit to be near you ? If you knew all, perhaps you would say that I am so ; for I have not told you all yet. I am going to tell you now. I am going to confess to you. Do you know what I have done ? As you drove me away, as you told me to rid you of my presence, I have tried—can I confess it ?—I have tried to be unfaithful to you. Don't attach to that its extremest and worst meaning—what it means really is bad enough. The memory of you as you drove me away—how hard and cold you looked !—was intolerable ; and I have been trying to obliterate your image by that of another woman. I have laid myself open with a deliberate recklessness to all the charms that beauty—that mere beauty—

possesses, longing to be charmed by them into some desperate forgetfulness of you, as an opium-smoker longs to dream.

“What will you say to me now—me who boasted of my faith to you? Do not be too hasty. I have something left still to tell you—in fact I have two things left. Which shall I tell you first? I will tell you first—for I can do that in a moment—that all the time I was doing this I hated myself, and I never was so conscious of my duty to you as I was during this first, this only violation of it. You must believe me. What I say is absolutely true. So much for that; and now let me tell you the other thing. Though I tried to be charmed by this woman, she has not been able to charm me. My effort was all in vain. The pleasure that I felt in her company was torture more than pleasure. Your image would not be obliterated. It is part of me. I cannot get rid of it. I am yours, and yours always. Why do you drive me away from you? If you do not scorn me for this degrading test to which I have put

myself, you will see how it at least proves the strength of my love for you. And perhaps the very strength of my love will make you despise me yet farther. If it does, I have but one thing to ask of you. Grant me one final kindness. Let me see you once again; and when you are saying good-bye to me, disguise your contempt in pity. Is that a great deal to ask, considering our past? Does all our past mean nothing? Was it the idle dream of two wicked and faithless children, who get each other into trouble and then hate each other? This is not so I know, so far as regards me. I cannot believe that it is so, so far as regards you, when I remember the words your lips have whispered in my ears, your eyes with all your soul in them as they married themselves to mine, and the love that shone and revealed itself in all the transfigurations of your face.

“Do you know these verses? They are not mine, except that they speak my meaning—

“‘Ah, dear, but come thou back to me !  
Whatever change the days have wrought,  
I find not yet one lonely thought  
That cries against my wish for thee.’”

This letter he sealed up in an envelope, on which he put no address, merely the word “Private”; but which, having written the following few lines to accompany it, he enclosed in another, directed in all due form.

“Dear Mrs. Schilizzi, forgive me for troubling you; but you will find, I think, that the enclosed belongs to you. It is evidently strictly private; so I enclose it in a sealed envelope, in order that, if by accident, it fell into other hands, there should be no chance of its being read inadvertently. Pray examine it, and let me know of its receipt by the bearer.

“Sincerely yours, R. GRENVILLE.”

Summoning his servant, he asked him to procure a horse, ride to Lichtenbourg, and deliver the packet personally. “It contains,” he said, “important papers, and must be put into the lady’s own hands. You must learn



from her maid when she is disengaged, as it wants an immediate answer ; and unless you can find her alone, and able to attend to the matter, don't leave the papers at all, but bring them back to me. Fritz !" he said, recalling him, "should she happen to be out for the day, you had better remain the night, and come back to-morrow morning."

The rest of the afternoon passed anxiously. At five o'clock he presented himself in the drawing-room, silencing the inquiries of the others by declaring himself much better, but securing an indulgence for a certain abstraction and listlessness by letting the impression prevail that he still was suffering. And, indeed, as the hours wore on, he began to suffer in reality. All through dinner, whenever the door opened, he turned round nervously in expectation of a letter for himself, and the tension of his nerves increased at every fresh disappointment. Afterwards they went to the billiard-table, and he was asked if he were well enough to play. He began to fear that they might suspect his malady to be

mental, and even—fear is so unreasonable—that they might actually suspect the cause of it. He accordingly made an effort, and laughingly took a cue. He surprised himself also by playing extremely well—only the smallest noise outside distracted him so completely that several of his best strokes he made with the wrong ball. At last the folding doors were opened with a crash. He dropped his cue. A servant with a tray came straight and quickly towards him, and on the tray was a letter. He felt that the others were observing him. Truthful as he usually was, he hid his confusion by saying, “It is a letter from the doctor in Lichtenbourg. It will keep. I sent my servant to him to get some directions about some medicine.” He resumed his play, and though his spirits had really risen, he did his best to repress all signs of recovery.

The moment he was alone he tore the envelope open. It contained but these few lines: “You don’t know what I have suffered since you left me. Are you coming back? Does your letter mean that? Will it be—

could it be—to-morrow? As to your enclosure, my opinion of it is this—that a woman would have a heart of stone who was not touched by it.”

Fritz next morning again had his work cut out for him. He was sent at eight o'clock to a town about three miles distant for a carriage. Grenville meanwhile wrote a note to his host, who was not an early riser, saying—and here most casuists would have acquitted him of untruth—that, although in his state of health there was nothing at all alarming, the news he had received last night made him wish to return to Lichtenbourg. This note, which was garnished with every necessary civility, he did not send till he learnt that the carriage had arrived; and having waited to receive a polite message from the Pasha, he drove away from the castle as fast as the horses could take him, without the embarrassment of an adieu either to Miss Markham or to anybody.

At first his spirits were lifted beyond his own control. The air blew freedom in his face, and his only discontent was that he

could not outstrip the carriage. But then presently, for some cause which he could not explain, his state of mind changed like a day rapidly overclouding. "Why should this be?" he asked himself almost angrily. "What is it that thus changes our moods so incalculably? Are we masters of ourselves? Or are we nothing—nothing more than an effervescence of succeeding thoughts, of which consciousness is the mere spectator?"

An unbidden change, at all events, did take place in him; and instead of looking forward to the meeting now so near, he began to look at himself, and examine himself from a new stand-point. He was conscious of the keenness of the pains he had lately gone through; but seeing that now they had disappeared so suddenly, he began to ask himself whether there was not something unreal in them, and something contemptible in the fact of his having made so much of them.

"Perhaps," he reflected, "when I am no longer divided from her, I shall find out that I no longer care for her. A fine condition I

shall see myself in then. Nothing can redeem my conduct except the genuineness, the enduring quality, of my main motive. If I find that my motive fails me—if my affection, which I have fancied so serious, proves to have been a mere caprice, or a piece of sentimental self-indulgence, I shall hardly know which to do first—to fall on myself as a brute who has deliberately trifled with her life, or laugh at myself as the self-made pauper who has deliberately ruined his own. I sometimes doubt,” he continued, “whether, after all, our conventional moralists may not be right, and whether a man who acts as I have done is ever sincerely unselfish—whether he will ever attest the love, of which he makes so much, by any serious sacrifice. For as to giving up fame and fortune—I can’t tell; but it is just beginning to dawn on me that this may resemble recklessness more than heroism.”

When he reached the hotel, however, these new and formidable misgivings were for the time, at all events, dissipated by an unlooked-for piece of intelligence. As he entered the

hall the first person he encountered was Mrs. Schilizzi's maid, who was just coming out of the office. She started and smiled at the sight of him, and hastened up to him to say, that she had just been sent down by Madame to find if he had yet arrived; and that if he had, Madame hoped he would come and breakfast with her. "Where?" asked Grenville. There was something in the message that surprised him. "In her own salon," said the maid. This surprised him further, as, since the departure of the Princess, she had had all her meals in the restaurant. But he had no time to reflect. It was nearly twelve already, and, following the maid with a beating heart, the door of the salon was being presently opened for him, and Mrs. Schilizzi was rising from a sofa to meet him. There was a smile in her eyes, half reproachful and half deprecating, and in the drooping poise of her head there was something that pleaded timidly. They looked at each other for a moment or two without speaking. Then everything else gave way to gladness. They



moved towards each other, she was close to him; but suddenly some influence seemed to arrest her gently. She took his hand meekly. There was no passionate embrace, but, hanging her head, she offered her soft cheek to his lips.

“Bobby,” she began, with her eyes looking on the ground. She faltered. She naïvely showed how little she could command her words. “Bobby—I want to tell you something. Here—come—sit down.”

They sat together on the sofa, and still she said nothing. He, with the tide of returning tenderness overwhelming him, put his arm about her and tried to draw her towards him. At first she yielded. Her eyes went out to meet his; and then, sharply but not roughly withdrawing herself, “Don’t,” she exclaimed, “don’t—I can’t bear it. Oh, Bobby, why do you distress me? Why do you tempt me to be so wicked?”

He was startled. Her reproach, which was one he had never heard before, coincided strangely with his late accusation of himself;



but he was conscious of one thing which he had lately been induced to doubt—the reality of his own pain at the mere thought of having wounded her. All he could say was, “I don’t know how to answer you. Forgive me.”

“I suppose,” she said, “you must think me very odd and capricious. When Paul is well and able to take care of himself, I don’t so much mind what I do; but when he is ill I can’t take advantage of that.”

“Ill,” he exclaimed, quietly moving away from her. “Irma, I quite agree with you. But you never told me he was ill.”

“Didn’t I? No, I suppose not. But he is; and both the children—they are poorly too. The doctor doesn’t know yet what the illness is, but I have been very anxious, and busy too—nursing all of them. As for Paul, I annoy him if I am much in his room; but he likes me from time to time to go and take his orders. He finds I attend to them better than any one else; and if anything goes wrong, he has more pleasure in abusing me.

But as for the children, I am with them nearly all day. If it hadn't been for this, I should have written to you sooner; and then," she added, looking at him with an odd smile, "in spite of everything I was expecting that you would write to me. Dear, sit away, please, a little farther still. I hear them. They are coming with the luncheon."

He asked her during the meal about the several symptoms of the invalids. The children, she said, seemed merely to have caught some chill—they were suffering from stiff necks, and had been ordered to keep their beds. Mr. Schilizzi had nothing so definite to complain of. "I fancy," she said, "it may be his liver, for he constantly feels drowsy, sometimes he is sick; and altogether he has no strength for anything, except to read novels as he lies in bed, to drink champagne, and to eat any delicacies he fancies; and this oddly enough the doctor lets him do. You see, Bobby, I have brought you back from your castle to meet nobody except a poor sick nurse—and even of her you will only see a

little. And oh!" she exclaimed, suddenly changing her tone, "tell me this—I was so glad to see you, I had forgotten all about it. That other woman—tell me that you don't love her. You do! I believe you do! If you desert me now, you will kill me."

A waiter at this moment entered, and asked her if she could receive the doctor. "Of course," she replied, "instantly." And then, turning to Grenville, "I must ask you," she said, "to go. I shall be busy for I don't know how long. But if you will come back at five, I could see you for half an hour and give you some tea, and we could then speak about dinner. Good-bye. Don't wait a moment longer."

He went. He got rid of the hours as best he could. He was touched and troubled by her anxieties, but he could not feel unhappy. In the first place, the doubts which had tormented him during the drive, as to the reality of his own attachment to her, had been dispelled by his experiences in her presence. "Whenever I am near you," he said to him-

self, "all my doubts vanish. My life is absorbed in yours."

But these reflections were not his sole satisfaction. He had another and even deeper one, welling up from another source, and lifting him to a level of peace to which he had been long a stranger. The source was his sight of her in the middle of her trying duties. The mere fact of her performing them was hardly in itself remarkable; but the complete self-forgetfulness, the almost religious devotion, with which, from his knowledge of her, he saw she was giving herself to their performance, elated him with a consciousness of her depth of truth and goodness. She was vindicating his own judgment of her, when she had felt doubtful of herself. She was showing him that he had not been soothing his anxieties with sophisms when he told her that, whatever the world might think of her, whatever at moments she might be tempted to think of herself, her faith to him had not divided her from her duty to others, and that everything in woman which is true, and tender, and noble

had been kindled and developed, not extinguished, by her loving him. He thought of that first expedition he made with her—of that drive to the Pasha's castle, and of the way she had impressed him by her sensitiveness to the beauty of nature—by her solemn and hushed delight in it. The suffering of those belonging to her seemed to touch her in a corresponding way. Just as beauty roused in her a craving prayer to appreciate it, so suffering roused in her an impulse of the same kind, to spend herself in the service of relieving it. As he left her room after luncheon he had met her maid in the corridor, who told him that for three nights Madame had hardly slept.

Returning at the time she mentioned, he found her awaiting him at the tea-table. She was flushed and agitated, and there was a trouble in her lips and eyes, exactly like that of a child lost in the crowd. "Oh, Bobby," she said, "I'm so glad you've come; and yet I don't know if I ought to allow you near me. Paul's illness has declared itself. It's the

worst form of diphtheria. If you're not afraid of me, sit down, and advise me. I'm half distracted."

"Afraid!" said Grenville with a laugh, which he saw was a spark of comfort to her. She smiled faintly but gratefully. She poured him out some tea, and then went on more slowly.

"The doctor suspected what was the matter, but he could not be quite sure, and he did not wish to alarm me. I've so much to tell you. Let me speak about Paul first. You remember a woman—don't you?—that he admired here. Well, even although my continued presence annoyed him, I should have been with him more than I have been, if the doctor had not informed me that this woman was his constant companion. Of course, neither Paul nor she had a notion of what was the matter with him; and he used to make her presents to induce her to sit and talk with him. Weak as he was, he used to laugh and chatter with her. But now, as the doctor says, of course she will not return—

not only because of the danger, but because the symptoms are not agreeable. Poor creature!" she went on, "I was sorry to see him coughing. I've been wiping his lips and doing all sorts of things for him, but the worst of it is that the fact of my doing them seems in itself to irritate him. I don't mind for myself, but I could see it was so bad for him. He struggled to raise his voice in order to find fault with me—especially when for a second or two I think I must have closed my eyes, for I am very tired—and that did something to his larynx, and his cough got worse than ever."

"How is he now?" asked Grenville, hardly knowing what to say.

"The nurse is with him now. With her, I fancy, he will be quieter. When she came into the room he smiled at her; and to me, without looking at me, but as if he were speaking to his pillow, 'My dear,' he said, 'you can go.' I went. There was nothing else to do; and anyhow soon I should have had to go to the children. But now about



them—do you know what the doctor says? What they have had has been just the same thing—diphtheria. It has, however, been a very mild attack; and now they are fast recovering. He knew about it before, and he told me not to kiss them, because, he said, they might give me a cold. He thought they would soon be well, and he didn't wish to frighten me. He's a kind man. But—oh, Bobby, tell me, do I bore you?"

She looked into his eyes searchingly. He tried to shape an answer, but his lips only trembled. She understood him. Her eyes told him so. She leaned towards him and continued. "All this," she said, "is only the preface to my troubles. The children, though they are supposed to be recovered, are still, according to the doctor, in a very delicate state; and the great thing for them soon—not to-morrow, perhaps, but next day—will be change of air. They will want most careful watching for weeks and weeks. The doctor has lent me a book. For the last ten minutes I've been reading it; so far as I can see, it

may be two months before we can be sure that they are strong again. Tell me—what am I to do? Where am I to send them? And must I go with them too? It would kill me to leave them; but then—Bobby—can you tell what I am thinking of? If I don't leave my children, I shall have to desert Paul. Give me your advice. Help me. Think for me. I am bewildered."

"I should like," said Grenville, "to share all your troubles, except your bewilderment. It is lucky I don't share that. I think your course is clear. Your children require you far more than your husband does. At all costs you ought to remain with them."

She walked to the window, turning her face away from him. He watched her. He heard a slight sob, and a slight movement showed that she was gulping down some emotion. Returning to him with swimming eyes, "Ah," she said, "but I feel this." She came close to him. She laid her face on his shoulder. "I feel this," she went on with difficulty. "I have never wronged my children, but I

have wronged Paul ; so I want to repay him over and over again." She looked up at him with a sudden momentary smile. "I shall make myself in that way more worthy of you. Don't be shocked at what I say. I dare say you don't agree with me ; and so far as my thoughts go, I can't *think* I have wronged him. But from habit, from the way one's been brought up, from the way even conventional opinion has somehow got into one's blood, I *feel* that I have wronged him, though I dare say the feeling is irrational ; and I want to cauterize this feeling by suffering for him—by wearing myself out for him."

"Irma," he said, "whatever my thoughts may be, I too at times have a feeling resembling yours. Till now I have been shy of telling you of it ; but I can never again have a secret from you. Little Irma, I understand you entirely. But come, whatever we feel, our business is to be practical. Let us just consider first what it is possible to do about the children. The most obvious course

would, I think, be to send them to the Princess."

"No," she said, "no. They are never well at the castle. They were poorly when last they went there."

"Well," he said, "then let the Princess take them somewhere. I have it. I happened to hear at the Pasha's that the Count's hotel in the forest is now formally opened, and that he has secured an excellent doctor, who is to live there during the season. One would not wish to bring a chance of infection to the hotel, but I could get Count T—— to put the lodge at your disposal. You could send the children with the Princess, or, if you liked, you could take them yourself there; and whether you would stay there or come back to your husband, you would be able to settle afterwards."

A nurse here entered, asking Mrs. Schilizzi if there were any further questions which she wished to ask the doctor. "I wish to ask him one," Grenville answered quickly; and, springing up, he hastened out into the passage.

He came back in a minute or two. "I am glad," he said, "that I spoke to him, for he told me something, which to you he could not have put so strongly. He has seen Mr. Schilizzi again, and he feels particularly anxious that you should leave him for the next twelve hours to the care of the two nurses. If you are there—as you have told me—from time to time he excites himself. Nothing is so bad for him as this, and therefore, for his sake, just at this juncture it will be kindest not to go to him. Will you promise me not to do so?"

She looked at him doubtfully, as if she thought he was trying to deceive her. "He's not worse, is he?"

"No," said Grenville, "no. You may keep away from him with a perfectly clear conscience."

"Well," she said, "if it's for his good, I will."

"That's right," exclaimed Grenville with an accent of great relief. "And now about the children; what I propose to do is this. If

you approve I will at once go to Count T—— (he's at home, I happen to know) and will ask him about the lodge. Then by the evening train I will go on to the Princess. I shall reach the castle before she has gone to bed, and I will be back here in the early morning, having arranged everything."

"Will you really," she said, "do all this for me?"

Her wondering incredulity, which melted as she spoke into gratitude, profoundly touched him. "Do me one little kindness," he said. "Lend me the doctor's book—I should like to look at it during my journey."

She gave it him and he was gone. He found the Count at home, who received him with the greatest courtesy, and at once placed the lodge at the disposal of himself or of his friends. He then hurried on to the train, which was to take him to the Princess. On the way he studied the 'book. He fancied that with more or less accuracy he could make out the general course which this disease, varying so in various cases, was taking with



Paul Schilizzi. Whatever the mother had done and suffered for her children would not have surprised Grenville, though it might have moved him afresh to some new act of reverence for the beauty of her passionate maternity; but with regard to her husband, towards whom, as he knew well, patience was the highest feeling, and indifference the kindest, which his conduct and character made it possible for her to entertain or cultivate—with regard to her husband the case was quite different. That she should see him properly cared for and supplied with the best attendance, that whatever he wished her to do she should do and do willingly, this was natural enough. But what she had been doing, still more what she wished to do, went far beyond this. So far as his wishes went, his illness made few claims upon her. To him a nurse's care would have been just as welcome as hers; and the only thanks she received were either neglect or anger. And yet, in spite of this, she longed to do for him whatever was hardest—whatever to herself was naturally most



repugnant; and what it was to which she was thus devoting herself, Grenville realized now, for the first time, as he read the account of the disease, and the attentions which were required by the patient. She had mentioned to him lightly that the symptoms were not agreeable. He now saw, from something else which had been told him by the doctor, and which fixed his attention on certain special paragraphs, that "these not agreeable symptoms" really comprised everything which could try and nauseate constitutions far stronger than hers. The infected air alone would for her be physical martyrdom; and there was nothing to sustain her, not even the sense that she was wanted—nothing but the passionate wish to be true to an ideal of duty. And for the sake of this she had not only watched and suffered, but had done so, despite all provocation, with a tender and unfailing patience. These thoughts possessed him during the whole journey. "*Quia multum amavit!*" he several times exclaimed to himself; and once he said, "Let me only be

worthy of her, let her only love me, till I die—and I shall not be afraid of death.”

The Princess had been forewarned by telegraph, both of his coming and of the cause of it. The children were her idols. She was awaiting Grenville impatiently. He told her of the scheme he had proposed for sending them to the Count's hunting-lodge, together with all details as to the neighbouring doctor. She approved highly, praising his readiness of resource; and when he asked her if she herself were coming, she answered petulantly—

“Of course I am,” as if she resented its being doubted. “My maid will see about packing my things to-night; and if the children can be moved to-morrow, I shall be ready to go with them. But the lodge—will that be ready?”

“Yes, it will,” said Grenville. “There is a train which passes your station at three o'clock in the morning. I return by that. I shall reach Lichtenbourg by seven. I will ride over to the lodge. I can get there by half-past ten; and I'll engage that by to-

morrow afternoon the whole place is fit for you."

"My poor friend," said the Princess with motherly pity, "you're almost dropping with sleep. You look yourself as if you'd been ill enough for all three of them." Grenville laughed and roused himself, for he was indeed nearly exhausted. "I tell you," said the Princess, "who causes me most anxiety. That's Irma herself. Of course in remaining with her husband she incurs the very gravest danger; and from what you tell me, her husband does not require her."

"I can't be sure," said Grenville, "how far she realizes the risk; indeed I myself till this afternoon knew very little about it; but I made her promise me that, at all events till I returned, she would stick to her children, and leave him to the doctor and the nurse."

"I," said the Princess, "will write her a note for you to give her. Any scrap of paper will do. I have one here. Will you lend me a pencil? Read it," she went on when she had finished.

“I shall be with you,” the note ran, “by the middle of the day to-morrow. You know I’m an expert nurse ; and you know also that I’m a very determined old woman ; so I may as well tell you exactly what I mean to do. I am coming myself to take charge of your husband, and leave you free to do what is your only and obvious duty, and that is to be off at once with the children. For their sakes you have no business to run the smallest risk of becoming ill yourself, and consequently unable to look after them. Every time you go into Paul’s room—at all events after you get this letter—I shall consider that you are doing by them a cruel and unjustifiable act. I must speak strongly, because what I know I have to overcome in you is a temptation supplied by your goodness ; but you must please resist it. If you don’t, you will show yourself unpardonably selfish. There—I have done. Take that for a parting dig, which your old aunt gives you too soon, that she may not have to give it to you too late.”

“Will that do ?” said the Princess, screwing

her eyes up, and a little pleased, through her anxiety, with the kind causticity of the ending.

Grenville said it was excellent.

“By the way,” said the Princess, “you too had better be careful. Nothing makes a person so liable to take the infection as this exhaustion from which you are now suffering.”

She looked at her watch, and advised him to take some rest on a sofa in an ante-room near the door, and gave orders that the porter should sit up to awake him.

When he found himself again in the train day was already breaking, and the damp grey morning was scented with leaves and grass. He told the guard to wake him at the proper place, and, lulled by the freshness of the air, lost his trouble in sleep. A carriage was awaiting him at his station. He slept again during the drive; and it was not yet seven by the time he was back at the hotel. Maids and waiters were scrubbing the floors and door-steps; last night's tobacco-smoke was floating about the premises, and a smell of

soap was mixed with it. To his great relief Fritz appeared in a moment, whom he begged to go instantly to Mrs. Schilizzi's maid, and inquire if her mistress were up, or if, at any rate, she were awake. An instant message was returned to him, asking him to go into her salon. He had not to wait long before the door of her bedroom opened; and with grave, floating eyes, and a diaphanous flush in her cheeks, which a rose-coloured dressing-gown turned to a spectral pallor, she softly came towards him.

"I have," he said, "settled everything." He spoke eagerly, and, as he hoped, reassuringly. "The lodge is at your disposal for the children, and your aunt will be here by mid-day. She sees how to settle everything. Here is a letter she has written you. All is explained in that."

She read it through. As she did so her colour deepened. She sank on the sofa.

"Sit down here," she said to him. "I have something to tell you. I wonder what you will say to me." As she spoke she was



close to him, but suddenly starting back, "What am I doing?" she exclaimed. "I may give you this horrible illness."

"Nonsense," he said, suddenly drawing on his invention. "The infection can only be taken from a person in whom the illness is developed."

She moved again towards him and took his hand.

"Listen!" she gasped. "Do you know what it is I've done? I've broken my word to you, and I've been again with Paul. He didn't know I was there, so I didn't excite or irritate him. His bed has curtains. I sat in a chair behind them. It was at night, and the room was dark, and I let the nurse sleep for an hour or two; and without his recognizing me, I did whatever there was to do. In some ways it's dreadful; only in seeing another suffering so, one forgets what one feels oneself. I suppose, however, one's body doesn't; for after two hours I fainted, and I was carried back to my room. But I couldn't keep away; and oh, Bobby, I can't now."



"Irma," he said, "were you only concerned, I would not try to dissuade you. But you know that I plead not for yourself, but for your children. I understand the reasons which commend to your own mind the other duty in preference to this. To do that duty seems to you a form of self-sacrifice. It is a form of self-sacrifice also to give it up. You will do most good to yourself by choosing what does most good to others."

"To be with the children," she said, "that in itself is heaven; and it seems to me now like running away from pain; and yet, when you speak of them, you disarm me. I have not the resolution to leave them; though—don't you think this?—for a week or so they could do without me."

"You quite forget one thing," he urged. "You might by remaining here make yourself unable to go to them for many a week, or, Irma, perhaps for ever. Have you any right to run that risk? Have you the heart to do it? You wouldn't run the risk of leaving them alone in the street. Can you bear the

thought of leaving them alone in the world? As for your husband, you may safely commit him to the Princess; and I will remain here also, to do whatever I can do."

"I yield," she said. "I see that you must be right. To be away from that sick-room costs me far more than to remain in it. Go, dear friend, and arrange things as you please for me."

A horse was ordered for Grenville, whilst he ate a hasty breakfast; and soon once more he was at the familiar hunting-lodge, making all necessary arrangements for Mrs. Schilizzi's arrival. Nothing escaped his forethought. Various provisions he ordered over from the hotel, and some articles of furniture which the manager kindly lent him. He had also a long interview with the doctor. Returning to Lichtenbourg, he found that the Princess had arrived, who was delighted—so far as the circumstances permitted of such an emotion—at finding her advice had been taken, not dreaming that it had needed seconding. Carriages were ordered by the ever-useful

Fritz; and almost before Mrs. Schilizzi knew what had been done, her boxes had been packed and sent on with a couple of servants; whilst a capacious landau, specially constructed for invalids, was waiting at the door in the warm afternoon sunshine, ready for herself, a nurse, and the two children. The briskness of the Princess's manner was of great service on the occasion. She told her niece she was "silly and wrong and selfish" for having any reluctance to do what so clearly was pointed out to her, not only by duty, but by ordinary common-sense; and with a semblance of anger, which acted like a moral tonic, and was sweetened at the same time by an under-current of deep kindness, she almost drove the little party out of the house into the carriage, where she carefully packed the children, kissing them whilst she did so. As they all drove off she stood waving her wrinkled hand at them, and forcing a cheerful smile, till a turn in the road hid them; and then her wrinkled hand found sudden occupation with her eyes.

"Schilizzi," she said to Grenville, as they turned indoors together, "is going on much the same. I have not yet seen him. I refrained from doing so till my niece was out of the way. I give you fair warning that in another hour I may be infectious; and so if you are wise you will avoid me as a dangerous character."

"My dear Princess," said Grenville, "I am not going to leave Lichtenbourg till you and all belonging to you are completely free from your anxieties. I only wish I could help you more than I can."

## CHAPTER XXXI.

CERTAINLY at that moment he was incapable of doing anything. He had had no sleep, except in unrefreshing snatches, since he left the Pasha's castle; and now that the chief object of his exertions was secured, physical weariness, long held at bay, asserted its rights at last, and he slept soundly till the evening. His first care on waking was to ascertain where the Princess would dine, in order that he might keep her company, and not seem to desert her. He was told that she would dine in her sitting-room, where he was at liberty to dine also, and she would be glad of his company, though she advised him not to give it her. They met. The Princess retained her spirits wonderfully. She said that the

invalid had every comfort possible, and that the badness of his temper gave her great confidence in his strength. She then turned the conversation to general matters, and sat down opposite to him, slightly smelling of disinfectants. The moment the meal was over she left him to his own devices, and he wandered out into the gardens restless and discontented.

With the departure of Mrs. Schilizzi, the whole place had become different. The band was sending music into the air, lamps were glittering, windows were shining through the leaves. Love-making and coffee-drinking were in progress at the scattered tables. But for him there was vacancy everywhere; everything had lost its interest. Nor was this the case with regard to the place only. He felt it to be the case also with the state of his own mind. His sublime ideas of the duty of pain relaxed themselves; and resolutions that had soared high in the morning, now came fluttering down with nerveless wing.

He sat down at a table, and ordered some coffee and a liqueur. As he was lighting a

cigarette, he caught sight of the doctor moving across the gravel towards the hotel entrance. He called him. The doctor seemed glad of a little society, and seating himself at the table called for some coffee also. Grenville asked after the invalid. "I shall see him again," the doctor said, "in an hour or so; and if you could come to the reading-room, I would meet you there and report to you. Ah!" he went on, "I am almost worn out by this time. It is reviving to sit here like this, and inhale the good clean air."

Grenville now talked to him about various indifferent subjects, and then ventured to say to him, "And how are you getting on yourself?"

"If," said the doctor, "I had only myself to think of, I should be getting on well—quite well; and even if I were not—what matter? I could bear it. But I have to think of others; and suppose I were to die now, my wife and my little children would be left in the world destitute."

Grenville tried to encourage him, and asked him about his practice. "Affections of



the throat," he said, "I believe are your special study?"

"Yes," said the doctor, "I have studied them in Paris and in London both; but here Herr Schilizzi's has been my first serious case." And so the conversation came back to the point from which it had started.

"I was reading," said Grenville, "the book which you lent his wife. There is a mention in it of your improved tracheotomy tube."

"Mein Gott!" murmured the doctor, as if talking to himself, "supposing an operation in Herr Schilizzi's case should be necessary, nobody without such a tube could perform it on a man like him. You never knew him, Herr Grenville, before you met him in the train, did you?"

"Never," said Grenville, drily. "His wife's family are my friends; and I only found out who he was by seeing his photograph afterwards."

"Bah!" murmured the doctor, "it is a bad, sad business!"

Grenville looked at him inquiringly.

“Herr Grenville,” he continued, dropping his voice somewhat, “Frau Schilizzi is a noble lady—she is an angel. He—you must know it as well as I do—is not fit to be her husband. I shocked you in the train—do you remember?—by my views about marriage. Herr Schilizzi is not fit, and never will be, to be the husband of anybody. Your English law, regarding him in that capacity, would pronounce his very existence to be a cruelty. I violate in telling you this no professional confidence. Herr Schilizzi does not realize the full gravity of his situation; but the fact which I tell you he makes no secret of. He was proclaiming it openly to two friends in my hearing. Bah! It’s a bad business. I have forgotten my own troubles in thinking about it.”

The doctor went, having some other patients to visit. Grenville rose also, and presently moved away to a remote quarter of the gardens, losing himself in shadow and solitude.

Whether the devil is a real person or no, it is easy to see how, without any external evidence, a belief in his reality may have

arisen ; for there are certain trials or adventures in the history of most minds which, though no doubt they may be accounted for in a more scientific way, are hardly capable of being described vividly, except by representing some alien spirit as an actor in them.

Through such a crisis Grenville was now passing ; and it cannot be described except in the way just indicated. The devil spoke to him in a tone of insidious languor, which seemed to be common-sense taking rest after exercise, telling him that now he might leave events to themselves ; arguing that he had already done far more than was needed of him ; and that to hang about the sick man's room, and live habitually with his nurse, was a mere Quixotic madness, endangering himself and benefiting no one else. " You had much better," the devil said, " remain quiet and not trouble yourself. The sick man is almost certain to die. At any rate you cannot save him. When he dies you will have nothing with which to reproach yourself. You will not have to think that you have caused him

a moment's pain; and then your life will be plain for you, and Irma will be yours for ever. Ah, my friend, I can see," the voice continued, "that you still are moved by the example of an emotional woman; and you still fancy that by emulating this example you will be achieving some higher and closer union with her. You say you will be worthier of her. My friend, you will be simply a fool. The best service you can render her is to keep yourself in good health, so that whatever happens you may be able to cheer and protect her." The thrust of each fresh suggestion Grenville resisted passively; but he felt that they weakened, even if they did not wound him. Then at last the devil, with the adroitness of a conjuror, seemed to slip into his very self, speaking with his own voice, and attempting to drive him from his duty by a quite new series of arguments. The devil told him that he was a self-deceiving dreamer—that all his passion was nothing but a wicked weakness, that all the duties which seemed to arise from it were fantastic, and that if he

were a man he would once for all break free from it, and lay his heart open to some other and healthier love. Then the devil, with a low whispering laugh, noiselessly left him, not dissatisfied with his work.

There are probably moments in the lives of the best of men when every efficient force in them is corrupted, except the will. Grenville's will in this case had not been conquered ; but as he wandered on listlessly, he felt that it was weak and faint. Still it had force sufficient, after no very long interval, to turn him back to the hotel, and prompt him to inquire for the doctor. Before he could see him he had a considerable time to wait. He was hardly conscious what he should say to him when he did so ; and, going into the reading-room, he began to study the papers. At last the doctor came. Grenville, on beginning to talk, heard his own voice like that of another person. He had a sense of curiosity as to what he should say next. He learnt, in answer to his inquiries, that Mr. Schilizzi was worse. Then he said, "Is there no way in which I can help ? Can

I be of any help to the Princess, and take anything off her hands?"

"No," said the doctor, "I honestly don't think so, unless you will go to a house about half a mile distant, and see if it is possible to engage another nurse. I am sorry to tell you that, in coming up the stairs in the dark, the Princess has sprained her ankle, and it has been necessary to put her to bed."

Grenville suddenly laid his hand on the doctor's arm. "Is a man," he said, "no use? Can I not act as a nurse? The Princess is my oldest friend. I am nearly connected with the family. If you can, for God's sake make use of *me*."

The doctor looked at him. "Are you at all aware," he said, "of the duties you would have to perform, or the conditions you would have to perform them in? I doubt if physically you could endure it. Have you had any experience of illness?"

"Listen," said Grenville; "I'll tell you what the conditions are—I'll tell you what I should have to do." And he rapidly ran



through the various details with which the book he had studied had now made him familiar. "As for my nerves," he said, "don't trouble yourself about them. When a man is as anxious as I am, he's no time to be sick."

The doctor considered for a moment. "Well," he said, "till a second nurse could be got, your help would, no doubt, be valuable. You could at least relieve for an hour or two the woman who is with him now. She'll tell you what to do, and she can then get some sleep in a chair. But stay—the patient is often extremely irritable, and a face that he knows—one can't tell why—might excite him."

"Listen," said Grenville, "I know what I will do. I happen to have with me a false beard and whiskers, which were got for me under very different circumstances. They will quite disguise me, and I can pass myself off as your assistant."

"Well," said the doctor, "in that case talk German. He understands it perfectly, and he will never detect your accent."



The disguise was not one that required long for adjustment, and Grenville presently, under the doctor's guidance, was crossing the garden to the annexe where the sick man lay. His will by this time was vigorous and wide awake ; and though his imagination menaced him with disgust, and though every nerve was shrinking, his resolution never wavered.

When, however, he entered the bedroom, the doctor, who watched his face, saw an involuntary change in it ; and snatching up a bottle of salts made him smell them, whispering,

“ You won't be able to stand it.”

“ Nonsense,” said Grenville, with an effort. “ I'm perfectly right already. Tell the nurse who I am, and let me be shown my duties.”

They were not difficult, though not a few of them were repulsive ; and made doubly repulsive from the inherent character of their object. But he felt himself urged onwards by a species of spiritual lever, working on some undefined fulcrum ; and the more physical disgust pressed against one extremity, he

was impelled in a direction precisely opposite by the other. Sharply awake as he was to the various offices required of him, of the rest of his physical circumstances he became but half conscious. The dim light falling across the bed-clothes; the collection of bottles, glasses, handkerchiefs, and basins by the bedside, and the discoloured face of the sufferer, on which suffering had but emphasized a leer, together with the oppression of the atmospheric conditions—all this became for him like some frightful dream, merely oppressing his senses, but leaving his mind untouched. As the hours wore on, he felt that he hardly knew himself. An instinctive and tender adroitness was actuating his arms and hands; his eyes and ears were unremittingly watchful; he shrank from no office, no matter how disgusting. Who the sufferer was, or how the sufferer was connected with him, almost escaped his mind. He saw merely a man who, antipathetic to him in health, was even more antipathetic now—who did not touch him with any sense

of compunction, or, except as a human being, with any sense of compassion. And yet over this man no mother could have watched more carefully, as he listened to his breathing, which seemed gradually growing more difficult, and raising him with an arm, when a sudden spasm woke him.

It was long past midnight, when the door softly opened, and the doctor again appeared. Grenville was watching. The nurse was still sleeping.

"Not another nurse to be had," the doctor said in a whisper. "If he ever thanks anybody, he ought to thank you."

Struggling with a fit of suffocation the sufferer started up in his bed. Instinctively in an instant Grenville's arm was supporting him.

"Let me," said the doctor, "take your place for a moment."

He sat close by the bedside, and made his various observations. He put some medicine to Mr. Schilizzi's lips, and applied some ice to his throat. Then drawing Grenville aside, he shook his head.

"It's a grave case," he whispered. "It takes its course slowly ; but the false membrane continues to increase in the throat. Stay—let us wake the nurse. You have relieved her long enough ; and I will finish what I have to tell you outside."

He touched the sleeping woman, who opened her eyes instantly, and resumed with a mechanical readiness her former station by the bed. He gave her a few instructions, then went out with Grenville.

"I am aware, Herr Grenville," he said, "that I may speak to you quite freely. In fact you can hardly have mistaken my meaning, when I said to you not long since, that Herr Schilizzi was not in good health when this disease attacked him. Did I tell you that in the hearing of others, as well as of myself, he voluntarily admitted the fact, making a joke of it as he did so ? He'll find that it's no joke now. His body is at this moment a mass of complicated corruption. He may pull through this attack. I shall judge better to-morrow ; but I think it

probable that within a very short time from now we may be driven to an operation on the trachea. If that is so, it will give us one hope more, and our only hope, though one which is too frequently disappointed."

They were by this time in the garden ; and touching Grenville's arm, the doctor said kindly, " And now let me prescribe for you. Go to bed at once. It's a prescription which I shall follow myself."

For a time, however, tired as he was, Grenville had no wish to do so. One delight in the middle of trouble was overwhelming him : and this was the delight of tasting the pure night air. There was dew on the trees and on the beds of sleeping flowers. He approached his face to a rose-bush, and the drops of the night baptized him. He was conscious of a scent of jasmine. Suddenly exhilarated, he walked away rapidly to the remoter parts of the garden. There was more light than the stars, though the sky was full of them, would account for. He thought there must be a moon somewhere ;

but having looked for its disc in vain, he recognized the pallor of the morning stealing up already over the heights of the stirred foliage.

!

Thanks to the faithful Fritz, who had slept in the hall to wait for him, he easily gained his room, where his rest was profound and dreamless.

His first care next morning was to inquire about the condition of the Princess. He learnt that she could not move, but would shortly be carried to her sofa. He sent word to her that he would come to her as soon as she could receive him, and bring the doctor with him, who would tell her all the news. He wrote at the same time a note to the doctor himself, so as to decide, before making the visit, how the news might be most judiciously told.

“I find,” said the doctor, who came to Grenville’s bedroom, “that the patient is going on precisely as I predicted; and in the course of to-day I think it is quite possible that nothing will be left for us but



the operation of which I spoke to you. Everything will be in readiness; and it happens that only last week I had my apparatus for removing the particles of false membrane sent me back from Vienna, with a slight but important improvement."

"Has not something of the same kind," said Grenville, "been done by the mouth of the operator?"

"Under certain circumstances," replied the doctor, "yes. But the risk is always great, and is one which no doctor, in my judgment, could ever be called upon to run. But in this case it would be simple madness. The operator who ran it might as prudently swallow poison. His danger would be infinitely greater than that of which he relieved the patient."

"Well," said Grenville, "we need not sicken ourselves with discussing the question. Let us go to the Princess; and this is what I wish you to tell her—that Mr. Schilizzi, though dangerously ill, has developed no unexpected symptoms. The disease is run-



ning its course, say—anything to keep her quiet. And above all, tell her—not that she is not wanted, but that all her own instructions are being carried out to the letter.”

The doctor was an excellent diplomatist; he even bettered the suggestions made to him; and the Princess, though she looked worn, smiled when he had finished his communication.

“And now,” said Grenville, appealing to her, “do you think you could do this—write a note to your niece, which I will send by my servant, begging her not to worry herself, and enclosing a note from our friend here—I am sure he will kindly write it—saying again what he has just said to you, and telling her that even were she here, there would be nothing whatever for her to do.”

The two notes were written, and Grenville added one of his own.

“And now,” said the doctor, as soon as they had left the sitting-room, “I’m sure,

Herr Grenville, you had better to-day take a drive or ride into the country. Later in the day, no doubt I shall be glad to see you again, but if you wish to take care of others you must first take care of yourself."

Many people who are subject to sea-sickness feel the touches of the malady before they have set foot on their vessel. The thought of the sick-room, and all its unwonted incidents, affected Grenville now in a very similar way. He was brave enough in enduring it for the first time, because past experience had supplied him with no terrors of anticipation ; but now the case was different. Still, without knowing why, he stood his ground, and declared that at all events, before walking or riding, he would, in his former disguise, personate the doctor's assistant, and visit the patient in his company.

"Stop !" he exclaimed. "Is not that your servant looking for you ?"

"It is," said the doctor. "I see by his face he wants me. Come, Herr Grenville,

if you mean to come you must be quick about it."

At the top of the stairs, outside Mr. Schilizzi's bedroom door, was a man who said in a whisper, "I have here the case of instruments. You have the key yourself. It seems to me they will be needed."

Through the thin door came the sound of a violent paroxysm of coughing, followed by a straining for breath, that was like a prolonged groan; and a moment or two later the sufferer had sunk back exhausted, and, as Grenville thought, dead. The doctor, however, knew otherwise.

"Herr Grenville," he said, moving presently from the bed, "I am glad that you insisted on coming with me. It relieves me of a certain responsibility. The disease has surprised me by the exceptional rapidity of its development. I wished, as I explained to the Princess, to have had a consultation this morning, but for that now there is absolutely no time. If I do not act instantly, Herr Schilizzi may be dead in half an hour. His only chance lies in my

operating at this moment. You can be of no assistance; you will be only trying your nerves. You will therefore forgive me if I recommend you to leave the room."

Very slowly Grenville was preparing to do so, when a low exclamation from the doctor's assistant startled him. The box had been opened, and though the requisite tube was there, the suction apparatus of which the doctor had spoken was missing.

"Mein Gott!" the assistant exclaimed. "It was taken out in order to have one of the screws adjusted. I will hasten and fetch it instantly."

"Instantly!" repeated the doctor. "Twenty minutes at the shortest. Listen—he is choking again. He'll be dead by the time you're back."

Before more could be said, Grenville unexpectedly interfered. Seizing the attendant by the arm, "Go to the patient," he said, and then addressed himself to the doctor: "Don't discompose yourself. The apparatus shall be my mouth. Not a word—I insist.

I know precisely what I am doing. Have no scruple in using me. You have a family dependent on you ; no one depends on me. Quick—quick !—out with your tools, and begin about it.”

“I tell you,” said the doctor, “you might just as well drink poison. At best the chance of saving the patient is small ; but it is large as compared with the chance against your saving yourself. Besides, it is an operation of considerable delicacy and difficulty.”

“Nonsense !” exclaimed Grenville. “I order you to let me have my way. Delicacy!—difficulty ! By God ! man, do you take me for an idiot ? I can spit through a tube—I can blow peas through a tube. Do you mean to tell me that sucking is less easy than spitting ?”

“You,” said the doctor, overcome by his determination, “are able to answer for yourself ; that man on the bed is not. I should not be justified in refusing this last chance you offer him ; though, bear me witness, I declare you are not justified in offering it.

The consequences will be on your own head."

"God be my judge," Grenville murmured inaudibly. "And yet what do I mean by that? If I owe a debt to any invisible creditor, he will understand. I offer him all I have." Whilst these reflections were rapidly passing through his mind, the horror of the duty which he was about to perform for a moment overcame his nerves. There was a sudden spasm of his muscles; he barely avoided vomiting. Meanwhile the room was full of subdued sounds. A moment more, and he was conscious of a metal something in his mouth. The assistant presently was exclaiming, "See, he is breathing freely!" and the doctor was pressing a glass to Grenville's lips, saying, "Take this—take it, and wash your mouth out thoroughly."

Grenville was docile. He did exactly as he was bidden; but before he retired, as he did almost directly, "Promise me," he said to the doctor, "to say nothing to the Princess of what I did, nor write anything about it to



Mrs. Schilizzi either ; at all events, not till we see that I am none the worse for it. I am not anxious myself, but it might add to their anxieties if they knew. You're a good fellow, so promise me to be faithful in this." The doctor promised. "And now," Grenville continued, "as soon as I have changed my clothes, and done all the little things that you advise, I shall tell the Princess that the patient is much easier, and ride over to the hunting-lodge, and give the same news to his wife."

"You couldn't do better," said the doctor. "Tell your news while it is true."

The second relief from the tainted atmosphere, the conviction, which he could not distrust, that he had himself done his utmost, the hurry of his toilet, and the bracing luxury of his bath, the bearing of his news to the Princess, and his preparation for his ride, left him at first little time for thought ; and he was hardly calm enough for anything that could be called reflection, till he found himself alone, rapidly riding through the forest, with



the smell of the pines blowing softly against his nostrils, and the rapid motion filling him with the joy of living. And now at last the question began assailing him—"Am I, as I ride, carrying with me the seeds of death? Is not this my last week of the air, the forests, and the sunshine? And will not my world be soon a sick-room like the one I have just left?" Sunshine and shadow lay upon the road interlacing; brooks which he passed were laughing and leaping like playing children, and the air moved everywhere as if it were a vagrant joy. He took it into his lungs, feeling that he was inhaling nature, and then, as he did so, asked himself, "Is it not for the last time?"

It was a question which he could not answer, and which indeed he could only half realize; so before long he managed to elbow it aside, or rather, against his will it was elbowed aside by another—a question relating to the probability not of his own death, but that of Mr. Schilizzi. This had occurred to him again and again before, but he had resolutely refused to

dwell on it, or the prospects which lay beyond it; and absorbed as he had been in practical and painful effort, he had repelled it easily.

But now it presented itself to him more importunately and vividly; and he felt he had earned a right to speculate on the consequences of a death, which he had risked, and perhaps forfeited, his own life to avert. This mood, however, did but last for a moment or two. He had hardly yielded to it before it shocked and disgusted him; and he presently exorcised it by sending his thoughts forward to the relief, if not to the pleasure, which he would be bringing to Mrs. Schilizzi by news pointing to the recovery, not the death, of her husband. He soon forgot everything else in this. The pleasure to himself even of being once more in her presence, and of reading the secret in her eyes, which swam in them through all her trouble, was a prospect which gave place in his mind to the pleasure of seeing the relief which, unconnected with himself, would come to her from the news he brought her.

As he approached the lodge, the first thing

that caught his eye was her red dress and her parasol, motionless by the border of the lake. At the sound of hoofs she suddenly turned round, staring at him, as if doubtful as to who he was or what was his errand. As he drew near, however, and as she recognized his face and his expression, she eagerly came forward with a smile of hope and of inquiry.

"I have come," he said, "to relieve you of the anxiety which I know must have been wearing you out here. You got the note which I sent over this morning?"

"Yes," she said. "How good of you! It arrived two hours ago."

"Well," he continued, "I have a later bulletin for you. He was far easier when I left him than he has been for the last twelve hours. You need not fret yourself because of your being here. There is nothing you could do for him that is not done by his attendants; and your presence might excite him, whilst with them he is quite quiet."

"And has he," she said, "not asked for me?"

"He has asked for no one," said Grenville.  
"He has not mentioned your name."

He wondered as he told her this whether she would be hurt by hearing it. A sound came from her that seemed to be a sigh of relief; and yet a faint meaning of sadness was given to it, when she said—

"Of course he didn't know how I sat up half the night with him, and how, had nothing prevented me, I would be at his bedside still." Then her face brightened and softened into a smile, as, laying her hand on his arm, she said, "Come in and see the children. Have your horse put up, and I'll tell them to make some coffee for you."

She went with him to the stables; but on turning back to the lodge—

"I think," he said to her, "I had better not see the children. I have been in his room; and though I have changed my clothes, one never knows if there may not be some chance of infection. I hardly know, indeed, if I ought to remain with you."

"Bobby," she exclaimed, "don't go, I im-

plore you. You won't hurt me ; and even suppose you would—if I had to consider no one except myself, I would say to you now, give me death with your lips. Bobby, do you think that I am very wicked and inconsistent ? And you went to see him, did you ? And you sat by his bedside ? Darling, wait a little with me. We won't go in to the children. We will have our coffee outside, under the beech-tree, as we have done before. Do you remember ? Do you remember our old times here ?”

When he said good-bye he gently held her at a distance from him. He kissed her hand. Such was their sole endearment. In spite of this interview, however, or, to speak more truly, because of it, he rode back enveloped in a deepening gloom. He had just been seeing a vision of all that life held for him ; what it might give him fully if Paul Schilizzi died ; what it might give him partially if Paul Schilizzi lived : and the terrible thought settled down on him like a cloud, that at this moment he was probably a

dying man himself; or that, worse still, if he was not doomed to death, his life would be blighted by some revolting and nameless taint—that perhaps even he might become an offence to look upon, and that at all events he would bear the burden of a hopeless and secret isolation.

But even now he was not conquered; nor, in spite of all these thoughts, was he dispossessed of the spirit which had brought him into his present straits. Once or twice mentally he cursed Paul Schilizzi; but he sharply checked the temper which prompted the passing outburst, and never for a moment allowed himself to complete the wish that anything which he had done during the past day and night had been not done. He even prepared his mind, should he find this to be required of him, for another vigil at the suffocating and odious bedside.

With a view to giving himself no time for flinching, the moment he reached Lichtenbourg he sent to inquire of the doctor if he could be of any further assistance; and, whilst



waiting for an answer, he hastened to the sitting-room of the Princess, in order to give her a good account of her niece. She received the news with a smile, but it struck him as a rather indifferent one; and setting it down to the pain of her sprained ankle, he asked her how it was, saying at the same time, "I suppose you have not been able to see Mr. Schilizzi?"

"You haven't heard, then?" she said, with a certain severity of accent. "And yet how should you? I suppose you have seen nobody. Paul Schilizzi died about an hour ago. There was another doctor present during the last moments; and it seems, at all events, that the best that could have been done was done. Had it not been for the operation performed on him, they tell me he must have died this morning. I'm sorry," she went on, as if anxious to relieve herself by finding fault with something, "I'm sorry that you should have troubled yourself to raise poor Irma's spirits, merely to make this heavy shock the heavier. Hark!" she



said, "that is the doctor's voice in the passage."

"I sent to him to inquire," said Grenville. "I suppose he has come to ask for me."

His voice as he spoke had a curious tremor in it. The Princess looked sharply up at him. He was standing near the open window, and she saw that he was shivering as if with cold. "Don't," she said, "stand in the draught having made yourself hot with riding. Call in the doctor, and let us speak to him here."

The doctor entered, and answered Grenville's questions, giving him an assurance which he had already given the Princess, but which she, nevertheless, was pleased at hearing repeated, that Mr. Schilizzi at the end had had little conscious suffering, that he had expressed no wish to see any friends or relations, that he had missed the presence and had noticed the absence of nobody.

"I hope," said Grenville, "that you will assure Mrs. Schilizzi of that. Her natural impulse will be to reproach herself bitterly for having left him."

"If she had not left him," said the doctor, "I promise you I will assure her of this—that she might easily have had one of her children leaving *her*. Herr Grenville, what's the matter with you? It seems that you have taken a chill."

"That's what I tell him," said the Princess. "Herr doctor, you must make him take care of himself. Send him off to his room, and give him a hot bath."

This, indeed, the doctor presently did, telling Grenville that, after the danger he had incurred, it was impossible to be too careful. "A common cold with you," he said, "might develop into something serious. As for this," he went on, anxious to be reassuring, "it is nothing; but don't neglect it. Dine in your own room. I'll send you a draught which will give you a sound sleep; and to-morrow morning we shall find that you're quite yourself again."

"One word," said Grenville. "As to Mrs. Schilizzi, she will have, of course, to be told. Will you go to the Princess and advise her

as to writing a letter, and, if necessary, add a line of your own, emphasizing the points I mentioned?"

Grenville, for his own part, followed the doctor's advice, though, when the morning came, he hardly fulfilled his prophecy. He had, indeed, the comfort of a dreamless sleep, so escaped the ferment of thoughts consequent on the new situation; but as to his physical condition, though he no longer shivered, he felt languid and unwilling to rise, and he realized gradually that he had a certain soreness in his throat. He did his best to convince himself that this was only fancy; and, though it cost him an effort, he at last got up and dressed. He had just finished his toilet, when the doctor made his appearance, partly to bring some news to him, and partly to visit him professionally. Having questioned and examined him as to his symptoms: "Ah," he said, "I don't think this will be much. You need not alarm yourself, but you ought to be very careful. I should have preferred that you had stayed in bed to-day, and, in-

deed, I should advise that presently you went back to it again. But as you are up, you will be doing no great harm to yourself if you will come down with me for a minute or two to the Princess. She wants to see you before Frau Schilizzi's arrival."

The Princess was better. With the aid of a stick she could walk a little, and she sat up instead of lying down on the sofa. The alertness, however, which was visible in her whole expression, Grenville saw at a glance was largely due to nervousness, and the questions she began to put to him showed him the same thing.

"I want you," she said, "to tell me once again exactly what you told Irma yesterday about her husband. It seems to me you must have spoken to her much too hopefully; and if you did the shock will be all the worse. When she comes I shall want both of you to be present—you, Herr doctor, especially—in order to assure her that she could have done no good by being here."

Grenville was proceeding to explain for a

second time what it was he had said—and he felt himself, as he did so, that he had perhaps erred in the way the Princess declared he had. “But it was,” he continued, “precisely because I knew how much her sensitive nature was suffering under her enforced absence, that I wished, since there was no question of bringing her back here, to relieve her from the tension of an anxiety that could do no good to any one.”

The Princess had no time to reply to this; for he was still speaking when the door of the room opened, and Mrs. Schilizzi herself entered. Haste and some overwhelming emotion were visible in her eyes and cheeks, and in her lips, which were at first compressed, and then opened as if gasping.

“And is it true?” she said, as they all looked in silence at her. “Is there really no hope?”

“Doctor,” said the Princess, “you explain it all to her.”

The doctor, without mentioning the operation, quietly explained to her that the course

the disease had taken, though not unusual, had been in this case unexpected, and again assured her that her presence would not only have been no help to her husband, but would have been unperceived by him. The words seemed, however, to make but little impression upon her.

“If,” she said, speaking to the Princess, “I had only been with him when he died—if I were only at this moment tired and ill with having watched by him—it would be different. But now—you have all of you kept me away. You have made me guilty of a desertion for which I can never forgive myself, and for which I can never atone.” Her voice suggested pain rather than ordinary grief. There was silence for a moment, then the Princess prepared to speak; but before she had delivered herself of more than a premonitory cough, Mrs. Schilizzi sharply turned to Grenville, and, with a hardening voice, said to him, “And you—you completely took me in. You told me he was better. You told me not to be anxious. If it hadn’t been for you, I might



have reached him in time. He was dying when you came to me; and with a lie you kept me away from him."

"Perhaps," said Grenville to the doctor, speaking with obvious difficulty, "you had better explain all to her—nothing, you understand, that respects myself: I merely refer to Mr. Schilizzi's illness. I told her that when I left the condition of the patient was easier."

"Frau Schilizzi," said the doctor, turning to her with great gravity, "Herr Grenville told you nothing but the truth. He forbore, by my advice, to go into needless details; but if you wish it, I may as well explain them to you. Yesterday morning, your husband's condition became such, that the only hope left us was to perform an operation on his throat, commonly resorted to in such circumstances. But for this, he must have died five hours earlier. The operation was successful, and had his health been good otherwise——"

But Mrs. Schilizzi would not suffer him to continue. "An operation!" she exclaimed. "He had suffered an operation—and you, Mr.



Grenville, told me nothing at all about it!" He was leaning against the wall. She rose up, and she went over to him. "Do you know," she exclaimed, "what you have done? You have taken my last chance from me. You have forced me to neglect him; you have allowed him to be neglected by others. You have killed him yourself, and the reproach of his death is mine. Speak to me, can't you! I advise you to do so now, for never again shall I give you an opportunity."

She seemed hardly to know what she was saying. One stinging sentence seemed to beget another. He looked at her fixedly with an expression of painful wonder. He tried to speak, but at first he had no voice; then a word or two came, hoarse and accompanied by a cough.

"Oh," she exclaimed ironically, "and so you have a cough now, have you! Much good that will do! You may at least muster voice to answer me."

Here, however, there was a movement made by the doctor. He had been watching Gren-

ville intently, and listening to the sounds emitted by him; and now going up to him, and taking him forcibly by the arm, he led him out of the room with a promptitude that ensured compliance. "Go," he said, "and get back to bed directly. In a few minutes I will be with you. Your life may depend upon your prudence."

Almost stupefied by the scene he had just gone through, Grenville went to his room with a dull mechanical resignation, and the doctor returned to the other two before either of them had uttered another syllable. He shut the door with a bang. In his cheeks was a flush of anger. He strode up to Mrs. Schilizzi, and confronted her with a look that terrified her. "Madame," he said, "that gentleman who has just left us has indeed done what you taxed him with, and kept back from you—and begged me to do so also—the most remarkable incident connected with your husband's illness. Seeing, however, the manner in which you treat him, it will be best for you—it will be best for every one—

that I tell you the whole truth. I cannot allow you to be ignorant of it. Herr Grenville, madame, whom you charge with having killed your husband, and to whom you say you will never again speak, when your aunt, the Princess was disabled, and one of the nurses failed me, attended your husband himself during the most trying night of his illness, with a nerve and a care which few trained nurses could have equalled; and when, madame, that operation took place, which you blame him for having concealed from you, it was solely his heroism which enabled it to take place at all. With his own mouth," said the doctor, his voice rising, "he performed the desperate function of removing through the tracheotomy tube the membrane that was suffocating your husband. No man walking up to a cannon's mouth took his life in his hand more surely than did Herr Grenville then; he did it knowing that the danger was worse even than I dare explain to you; and events will have treated him with a favour which he had no right to reckon upon, if he is

not now laying himself down in his bed to await the death from which he struggled to save your husband."

"Doctor," cried the Princess shrilly, "stop—I order you to stop. Look at my niece. Can't you see what you are doing to her?"

Mrs. Schilizzi's face had indeed undergone a change. Its expression had softened into one of helpless sorrow. Her eyes were wide and appealing, then they became vacant. "Don't let him die!" she gasped as her strength failed her; and the doctor in another moment had placed her, unconscious, on a sofa.

"You need not be alarmed," he said quietly, turning to the Princess. "She will come to herself presently."

The Princess showed by a look that she was sufficiently aware of this, and said with an anxious sharpness, "Is it really true that you are alarmed about Mr. Grenville?"

"He has," said the doctor, "taken a slight chill which, as I have seen during the last ten minutes, has already affected his throat; for seven days he will probably be a prisoner in

his own room ; but I hope, as we have certainly taken the disorder in time, that he may escape any serious consequences, though the escape will be very narrow, and is, I am bound to tell you, very far from certain. As for Frau Schilizzi, if you will permit me, I will summon her maid, and I will go myself to a patient who needs my attention more."

## CHAPTER XXXII.

SOME ten days later, sitting up in his bed, and bearing traces at once of weakness and returning strength, Grenville was listening to the doctor's welcome announcement, that he might leave his room for an hour or two, and enjoy the luxury of a drive ; whilst very soon, if he wished it, he could probably leave Lichtenbourg.

The doctor, whilst giving his patient this welcome news, found his eyes arrested by something that was lying on the table beside the bed. It was a roll of paper-money, tied with a coloured tape. The doctor started, remained for a moment motionless, and then turning nervously towards Grenville, tried to say something, but could not get out a word. Gren-

ville presently perceived the subject of the doctor's observation. A look of guilty embarrassment made its way into his face, and his pale cheeks became pink with a faint blush.

"Herr Grenville," exclaimed the doctor at last, "a light has suddenly broken on me. Forgive me—let me speak plainly. I recognize something on your table. I gave it to the manager of the hotel. He lent me some time since 2,400 florins, and has lately pressed for the repayment of them. But the day you were taken ill, he told me that if I paid a quarter, the rest, should it be more convenient to me, might be paid in a year's time. I gave him the quarter—and I see it lying there. Herr Grenville, it is you, and not he, that have done me all this kindness. You have saved me from ruin. Mein Gott—how shall I thank you!" And the doctor's big round eyes were like two saucers with slops in them.

Grenville's last effort before taking to his bed had been to beg the manager not to press the doctor, but to ask only for a quarter of the total owed—a sum which to Grenville



at the moment was little short of necessary. "Give me the balance," he now said, "when it suits you. You needn't thank me except for a common piece of friendliness. Pay me five per cent. if you like, and my money will have been well invested." "Irma," he said to himself, when the doctor had gone, "Irma," he said, doing himself considerable injustice, "if it wasn't for you, should I ever be kind to any one?"

Then he turned to a little pile of letters, which were lying by the doctor's bundle. It was evident they had been read already. He began re-reading them.

The first consisted only of these few words. "Forgive me—forgive me. They will not let me come near you. They tell me you will soon be well. I wish I could kneel to you, and once more say, 'Forgive me.'—Irma."

The second, which was dated the following day, was longer. "Your servant gave me your message. It was only 'Thank you. Write again.' I believe you meant to show

me that you are at all events not implacable. I must have been mad—mad—when I spoke to you as I did. This morning Paul was buried. All the world seems suddenly so hushed and strange to me that, just as in a church one is afraid to speak or laugh, I am afraid to let myself think or feel. But at least I may tell you I hope you are not suffering. I may comfort myself with the confidence—the doctor gives me this—that your recovery will be rapid; and—once more—oh, forgive me.”

Then came these, of which every day had brought one.

“The Princess goes home this afternoon. Her ankle is almost well. I too must leave. I am obliged to rejoin my little ones. Thank you for your few words, which I could see you wrote with difficulty, telling me that my letters soothed and did not disturb you. I shall drive over to-morrow, perhaps taking the children with me, to inquire after you. And now shall I tell you one thing? Dare I? Will you think ill of me for it, considering what took place yesterday? Will

you think—? Oh, Bobby, I don't know quite what I mean; but I will tell you what it was I did. Last night I was told you were sound asleep. My maid had just heard this from your servant, when I asked about you. She was in the passage outside your room. I asked her to look in. Yes—you were sleeping. I came in myself on tip-toe, just to have one look at you; and then I stooped down and gave you one kiss on the forehead. I saw my little scribbles lying on the table, amongst your medicine glasses. It made me cry to think that such little things could please you."

"I am," ran the next note, "writing this in your hotel. I have driven over, with my two children, to ask for you, as I said I would. Send me a line—a word or two; or else a mere message. I hear you are much better. Oh, if I could only see you! But it would not be allowed me; and under the circumstances I ought not to ask it. Oh, to be with you again, and to hear your lips say, and to see your eyes look, the forgiveness that

you have written to me ! When I see you again will you be quite the same ? Are you sure you will ? I shall not be. I shall be changed ; but if you still can care about what happens to me, it is not a change that will displease you."

Weak though he was, he had written her a short answer, as hers of the next day showed.

"You tell me," she said, "that the doctor thinks you may move soon. But oh, what do you mean by this—? You write, 'If I die, I leave my diary to you. It is full of you. It is full of nothing else. It is in a packet sealed up and directed to you.' Why do you frighten me ? And yet what you say touches me so. I am sending you something. Open it. It is an acknowledgment. It will show you how completely I am, in your hands. Oh, Bobby—you are getting better ; I see it in your handwriting. Yes—you will move soon. Where will you go ? You will think I am very selfish ; for the first thought in my mind when I ask that question is whether

you mean to go without seeing me or saying a word to me. Don't do that, Bobby. Tell me all your plans. Need you go far away? I hardly know what I write. This air agrees with the children wonderfully. They are getting quite strong again. The loss they have suffered made them curiously quiet at first; but the return of health makes a kind of spring in their minds, and they are beginning to play in the forest, as in the days which you remember. Send me a line—one line even is better than nothing; and tell me that you are getting stronger."

Along with this letter had come a packet, which was lying on the table, partly but not quite undone. It was her own diary. He saw it was that. He had reverently raised it to his lips, and laid it down unopened, like some sanctuary which he hesitated to profane.

Her next day's note, and the last of the collection, was this. Grenville had just received it, and it was dated the previous night. "Fritz arrived with yours, only an hour ago. Yes. Come here. How can I say no? I

could not have ventured to make the suggestion myself, but I was hoping and dreaming that you might be moved to make it. Come to the hotel. I will order the best rooms for you. Would you like to have those that once upon a time were mine? Oh, Bobby, when I think of all that you have gone through, and when I now know that each day you are growing stronger, a duplicate of your health seems to be springing up in me; only the name of the plant in my soil is not health but happiness. Any day now I will expect you; but if you can, give me a few hours' notice. I still am nervous and shaken; and even a pleasure that took me by surprise would be a shock to me."

As Grenville was finishing his reading, Fritz entered the room, with towels and hot water, and, opening the window a little, admitted a whisper of leaves, and a breath of sunny air scented with early summer. Grenville felt like a soul entering Paradise, as the freshness reached his nostrils; for what stole into his mind was not the summer only, but the pre-



science also of an unbelievable something into which his own life was expanding. By midday he was breakfasting in the sitting-room lately vacated by the Princess. Then followed his drive. His last excursion in the environs of Lichtenbourg had been the walk he took on the morning when Mrs. Schilizzi had explained to him that she wished he would rid her of his company, and banish himself to the Pasha's castle. That morning he had hardly known where to wander, for every road held some happy memory of her which would then have taunted him in his misery. But now to these roads he was again licensed to return—the happy memories again were becoming part of his own life. His only difficulty now was, what road to choose. It was a choice between pleasures, and he lingered over it throughout his meal. When at last he found himself in the carriage, the whole world seemed bright with blossoms. High laburnums bosomed themselves on clouds of leafage. Thorn trees had broken out into masses of white and pink, and their faint but penetrating scent was



straying in wayward courses ; and his own memories were blossoming and floating everywhere, like the blossoms and like their scents.

The doctor that evening gave him the unexpected information that, if he chose to do so, if he would take proper precautions, and if he would not travel too far continuously, he might leave Lichtenbourg next day. "And where," he asked presently, "would you think of going?"

The question caused in Grenville a certain amount of embarrassment, but without any actual untruth, he managed to get out of it creditably. "The Princess," he said, "will have me whenever I wish to go to her; but, before doing that, I must see Mrs. Schilizzi; so I thought of going first for a day or two to the hotel in the forest."

The doctor declared that nothing could be better than this, as the air there was healthy and bracing to an extraordinary degree. "In fact," he said, "I should advise you to remain there till you are quite strong again."

"And now," said Grenville, "I must ask

you an important question, and I trust you to answer candidly. Do you think that my health in any way has suffered, or is likely to suffer, from what I have gone through? I say *in any way!* and you will not misunderstand my meaning."

"Herr Grenville," said the doctor, "had your health been less sound than it was some ten days ago, my answer might have been either a doubtful or a painful one. I cannot say that what you have suffered has left absolutely no effect on you; but the effect, I can tell you confidently, will be no more than this: your throat may be more delicate than it was before—more liable to the attack, say, of some form or other of laryngitis. I must advise you then to take great, though not excessive, care of yourself, and not to neglect precautions at which otherwise you might have safely laughed."

The first thing next morning a messenger was sent to the hunting-lodge, with the announcement that Grenville would follow in the course of the afternoon. He did so; but

the carriage being heavy, the journey was slower than he had anticipated, and it was five o'clock before the manager of the hotel was showing him into the sitting-room, with which he was so vividly familiar. Lying on the table was a note. It said—

“I will wait in for you. Will you come over and see me? I wonder if you would be able to dine with us?”

He sat down, fatigued a little with the drive, and looked about him for a minute or two. Every vase or jar which would hold flowers was filled with them. Some were wild-flowers, but there were others—especially some roses; and he divined that these must have come from a certain neighbouring garden, which he himself, wading amongst grey dew, had once rifled in the hush of a dim dawn.

He longed to hasten to the hunting-lodge. He longed to say that he would dine there. But not only prudence, but an actual sense of weakness, prompted him to write and despatch the following note instead:—

“I must not come this evening. I am not

very strong yet. You must dine here, and must bring the children with you."

An answer was brought back to him on a folded scrap of paper.

"Yes," it said, "we will come."

An hour or so later, as he was still resting in his chair, he heard in the passage a pattering of light feet. There was a light knock at the door, and in came the two children. They came close to him, and gave him their faces to be kissed. He looked for their mother. They had left the door open. He knew she must be coming. She stood presently in the doorway. Above her soft black dress, her face once more to Grenville suggested the petal of a pale geranium. There was in her attitude as she stood there a moment's gentle hesitation, and what her eyes suggested to him was the clear shining after rain. Their meeting was made easy by the children's presence. There was no passion perceptible in it—nothing but a gentle and profound quiet.

"Rest," she said, "rest. I am not going

to have you standing. Go back to your chair, and I will bring mine beside you." Softly, tenderly, for a moment she laid her finger-tips on his forehead, and murmured, half smiling, two lines of Shelley's—

"My hand is on thy brow,  
And my spirit on thy brain."

She asked him how he was. She told him about the health of the children. Then in a low tone she said a word or two about the funeral, and added,—

"I know now that I could really have been of no service. The doctor told me that I had nearly been very ill myself. That was the thing which really at last quieted me. It was a witness borne by my body that I really had done my best. I wouldn't believe my soul, though that said the same thing. I fancied it was deceiving me. I couldn't bring myself to believe it. Why should the witness of our body be so much the more convincing?"

In their voices, as they spoke together, there was no note of sorrow, but there was

something subdued and hushed—a tribute of reverence to the solemnity of a recent human catastrophe. Then came dinner and the ripple of the children's talk, in which not even the knowledge of death could silence the laugh of childhood. Their mother and Grenville had to speak to them about their food. One child had an absurd struggle with a chicken-bone; the other, by and by, a miniature tragedy with her gravy; and the conversation, as it flitted from one such trifle to another, though still subdued, gradually became more natural. The two small mouths were busy and getting sugary with sweet-meats, when the nurse arrived to summon them back to bed.

“Let them,” said Mrs. Schilizzi, “have a little run on the way, and I will watch them from the balcony. Go, children—go. Mother will come soon; and if you can, catch a fairy to show her. Only mind, it must be a good fairy.”

She and Grenville went into the balcony, and watched the two small forms flitting



about below them. Presently from a clump of bog-myrtle rose a large pale-winged moth, to which the children instantly gave chase, jumping into the air, and reaching their hands towards it. As she watched this incident, Mrs. Schilizzi laughed. The sound was that unconscious ripple which Grenville knew so well. He turned to her. Her face was bright with a happy smile. It was a smile like the year's first snowdrop.

"Bobby," she said, "you mustn't stay out too long. You look so worn and tired. You had better come in now. Take my arm; you are not too proud to lean on me."

She closed the window so as to keep the draught from him. She seated herself beside him on a sofa, and looked at him gravely and in silence. At last her form made a slight movement towards him. In an instant, gently and closely, like the tendrils of a noiseless plant, his arms were about her neck, and his lips were whispering in her ear, "Irma, from this day I will never, I will never leave you."



“Hush, oh, hush !” she exclaimed, softly disengaging herself. “I will never leave you either, if you will let me remain with you. But for a little while you must let me watch over you like a mother. You are very weak still, and I must treat you like my little child. You are not strong enough yet even to catch a fairy.”

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

THEY had arranged before separating that, if the weather was warm enough, they would go next morning once again into the forest, and sit again at the foot of a certain beech-tree, whose smooth stem still shone in their memories. The morning brought with it all the warmth they could have wished for. The scented air touched them like tepid water ; and they drove with the children along the remembered track, above which the squirrels still leapt in the branches. They found the glade they sought ; they found the very beech-tree. They seated themselves under its shade, which now was a darker green.

They could hardly realize the peace of their present situation—a peace which trembled

with happiness as a breeze-touched sea with sunlight ; and it was almost a relief to them, as showing them that they were not dreaming, to find that, like a sun-lit sea, it had also a passing cloud or two.

“Irma,” he said, “we still have some difficult things to settle.”

“Tell me,” she murmured, “what things. I too know of many ; but I want you to speak first.” Grenville hesitating, she presently went on. “After all, we have still something to settle with our consciences.”

“Have we ?” he answered. “I think so sometimes, and sometimes I don’t think so. What I feel now is this—that if we owed our consciences anything—no matter how much—we have at least offered them the utmost payment we could make.”

“You,” she said, “have indeed done so. I too wanted to pay my debt as you did. Do you think that my mere wish was payment complete enough ?”

“Don’t,” said Grenville, “let us trouble about this now. Fate, or the course of events,

or what I should like to describe as God, has gently given us back what we both gave it to take. If to God, or to law, or to our own souls, there is still a payment due, since we could not make it with our deaths, let us think how we may make it with our lives. Do you know," he went on, "it often seems to me that we may go just as far wrong, and show just as little moral courage, in accusing ourselves, as we do in excusing ourselves. Do you remember the verses I wrote?—I have often thought of them since—

‘And we will turn the dark to daylight by  
That one sole lamp—our own fidelity.’

Don't fret yourself, Irma. We will together learn what to think of things."

She looked down on him softly. "I couldn't fret now," she said, "if I wished to."

"When," Grenville resumed, "I spoke about things to be settled, I was thinking not about all this. I was thinking not about our past, but about our immediate future."

"Yes," she said nervously. "What is it? Don't say you're going to leave me!"

"If I did," he answered, "I should trust you not to believe it. No—but before we are able, without offending the world, to establish a relationship between ourselves which the world can recognize, some time must elapse. If we alone were concerned such a question need not trouble us. I can never be yours more truly than I am at the present; but just as one dresses oneself in order to go into the street, so, if our relationship is to be shown to the world eventually, it would be an outrage not to dress it in the world's prescribed formalities. With me, then, the practical question is this. How, till this is done, can we best remain together? Shall I tell you what I have thought of?"

"Tell me."

"Do you remember how often I have talked to you about Italy? If we find it suits the children, shall we travel for some months there—say till the winter? This could be done without causing the least remark. Whenever it

was desirable, we might stay at different hotels. There need be no division between us, except to the outer eye; and if we are only wise in choosing our times and seasons, we need encounter no eye that would have any interest in observing us. What do you say, Irma? Speak to me. Tell me your opinion."

"Oh," she said at last, "it is all too delightful. Only, Bobby,—I wonder if you will understand me,—I don't feel that just yet it is right even to think of it."

"Never mind," he answered. "Think of it when you like. I dare say we are none of us in a condition to travel yet; and meanwhile, whilst we rest here, I will remember I am your child, and afterwards, as long as you wish it, you must remember that I am your brother."

She laid her hand on his, and her eyes were like skies unclouding. Suddenly both grew aware again of what had been escaping their senses—the rustle of the leaves, the sharp singing of birds, and all the life of a summer not yet out of its childhood. The happiness which they had known before on that very

spot, rose out of the mosses, tingling in the air around them. The past began, like a slowly swinging censer, to scent up into the present its clouds of perfumed memory.

The same evening after dinner, as they sat together in the twilight, the charm of the future began to operate on their fancies, and the scenes glimmered before them which they hoped soon to visit.

“Have you forgotten,” she said—“I have not forgotten it—the momentary picture of Italy with which once you stirred and dazzled me? I remember your very words—boats gliding on lakes with sails like the breasts of swans, the marble peaks of the pure Carrara mountains, rising out of violet mists, and glittering in a sky of primrose colour, the notes of the Angelus trembling from craggy villages amongst the Apennines.”

“Yes,” said Grenville; “we will see them all. We will sit together above Como, in an arbour of which I know, whilst the banksia roses round us are fretting the purple twilight.”

“And I,” she said, “will not trouble you



with questions about our past. Whatever we ought to think of it we shall learn to think. Our united lives will teach us."

This programme began to be realized sooner than they had dared to anticipate. The whole party, Grenville especially, recovered strength rapidly; and matters connected with the estate of her late husband made it desirable for Mrs. Schilizzi to go for a few days to Vienna. Grenville accompanied her, now without anxiety. One morning when, as usual, he came to her apartment, to breakfast with her, she met him with a look of excitement, holding in her hand a letter.

"What do you think?" she exclaimed. "I have only now learnt it. Paul never told me. I have just heard it from our lawyer. It was Paul who bought your house, that he might sell it to Prince —— of ——. The Prince, or the Queen, or the nation—I don't understand these things—will give twenty thousand pounds for it more than Paul gave you."

In blank surprise, Grenville sank down on a sofa, saying nothing for a moment, but staring

at Mrs. Schilizzi. Then the recollection came back to him of Mr. Schilizzi in the train, and his glowing account of his operations in country properties. "Tell me," he said, presently, "all about it. With regard to that and to other things, let us try and understand the situation."

"So far as I can gather," he wrote that night in his diary, "we could if we liked return to my old home and live there. Unless it is resold—and there is no obligation to sell it—it will entirely go to Irma, my little step-daughter; but it seems that, for her life, it would belong to Irma—my own Irma. I am glad of this, and she is glad also. We are glad we might live there, for this reason—because thus we are enabled to refuse to do so. We will touch nothing of Paul Schilizzi's money, except in so far as we touch it for the distinct benefit of his children. My old home shall never be my home again through him. We both agree about this point. Our feelings are perhaps fantastic. Never mind. This is our determination. We can neither of us really believe

that we have done that man a wrong ; but we do feel that we never could receive from him any benefits. Irma's business here is done, and we start to-morrow. We start for Italy. It seems to me an unbelievable dream. We go to Vicenza first, and I think then to Siena. We shall see. The world is all before us.

“ This evening Irma asked me if I had read her diary. I said I had not. I said that I felt as if to do so would seem like implying a doubt of her. She said, ‘ No—no. I am pleased that you should feel that ; but indeed you need not. I know that you don't doubt me ; but I have been thinking over the past, and I am horrified to see how capricious and cruel I must have appeared to you. You *have* thought me capricious and cruel. Don't deny it. I know you have. Hush—don't answer me yet. Let me go on speaking. You don't think me so now—you don't any longer doubt me ; but as to the past, I am certain you do not understand me. You will if you read my diary. That was why I sent it to you, and therefore, for my sake, read it.

Nothing will divide us then, I think—not even one jarring memory.’

“I told her I would read it ; and we talked of other matters, but just as I was going to leave her, she came back to the subject. She spoke half shyly. ‘When you read it,’ she said, ‘don’t speak about it to me. I want to know that you have read it through as a whole ; but I don’t think I could bear—you see you have all my inmost thoughts there—I don’t think I could bear to speak about them in detail, even to you. Do you understand me ?’ I said I did ; and I did. I shall open her volume for the first time to-night ; and each night during our travels, when I am alone in my own room, I shall read a little.”

The day following, as had been arranged, they all started for Italy ; and he studied the diary night by night as he had proposed to himself. With regard to one point, however, he found himself deviating from the course he had anticipated. Instead of reading the volume straight through, he found himself instinctively turning to the records of those

days when her conduct had so wounded and troubled him, when the ideal he had formed of her had become so distorted, and almost lost, and when his heart had been seared with a pain, the smart of which he remembered still. And here in her diary he at last found complete healing.

During all that time in London, when he had felt her to be treating him so ill, he discovered that in reality all her hours had been full of him. He compared carefully his own diary with hers, for those days when her notes to him had been shortest, or her words hardest ; and all the anger which he had then felt against her, with a sensation of rapture he now turned against himself, taxing himself with selfishness, with want of patience, with a stupid want of understanding, and by the shadow which he cast upon himself, making her image brighter.

The following was her diary for her first day at her mother-in-law's. It was addressed to himself, as it was on so many other occasions.

“What weariness all these hours have been without you ! Now you are no longer with me, the sun seems extinguished, and all the air is winter. I have been to-day with my lawyer. How hateful and perplexing all my business seemed ! Had you been with me to help me, everything would have been different. And how am I to see you ? My mother-in-law is preparing to map out every minute for me. She is making engagements for me ; she is going to drive me out in her brougham, with both the windows closed, whilst she sits wrapped up in a rug, her feet on a hot bottle, a tract in one hand, and what she calls her vinaigrette in the other. I can't help laughing a little. I must do my best to be patient. But I feel this—that she is spinning round me a spider's web of circumstances, which will entangle me like a fly, and keep me away from you. I wonder if you care as much as I do ? I have written to you to-night, for there is one hour when I may be able to see you to-morrow ; and yet even about that I cannot feel quite certain. I may have to put



you off at the last moment; and I shall hardly sleep to-night owing to this wretched uncertainty. But still I mean to be patient. For your sake I wish to be as good as I can be; and you must help me. I trust you."

In the next day's diary Grenville read this. It was her account of his visit to her in Mrs. Budden's drawing-room. How different from his own impression of it!

"I saw you this afternoon—but rather it was not seeing you—or rather it was only seeing you. It was like seeing water, and only seeing it, when one is thirsty. I don't know what I talked about; I have quite forgotten; but I know that I said nothing, and could say nothing, that I wanted to say. And you thought me so stupid, and you will soon cease to care for me. I know you will—how can you help it when I am so stupid? You will leave me; and then what will happen to me? And every day now it will be harder for me to meet you."

Then during the next few days came entries such as this—

"Without you I am like a child lost in the



streets. The people round me bewilder me as if they were ghosts ; and when I do see you for a few troubled minutes, you are sometimes displeased and rough with me—at least I think so. And then in answer I think I sometimes speak sharply. But I hardly know what I have said. To speak to you as I want to speak seems hopeless now—impossible.

“The people round me seem to have claws clutching at me. I can hardly get away from them. My mother-in-law, or a sister of hers, or somebody, always wants to come with me wherever I go. And somehow I can’t even write to you. All day long things are collecting in my mind which I want to pour out to you ; but when the time comes to write them, I find that I can’t put them on paper. I have sat this evening with a sheet before me, and with a pen in my hand, thinking pages and pages to you ; and then it has ended in my writing only these miserable lines in my diary.”

Then came this. It was dated on one of the days when she had seemed to him most heartless and frivolous.

"I was looking this morning at some of the jewels Paul gave me. If I could, I would sell them, and give the money to a charity, or else give it to him. But to do neither is possible. I wish to render Paul whatever service I can, but to accept nothing from him. What I must do is this—whenever he desires me to wear any of these things, I will wear them; but only then: and I shall regard them then merely as his livery, which I humiliate myself by wearing to please him. Bobby, I once took pleasure in all these pretty things. For your sake now I hate them.

"This morning I had two hours to myself. I couldn't write to you, and arrange to meet you; so I went instead and saw some poor people near here. I sat with them, and talked to their children, and arranged to do whatever I could to help them. You would wish me to do things like these, wouldn't you? I know how kind you yourself are; I know how much you feel for the unhappiness and pain of others. I felt all the while that I was doing what you would wish. Is it not

strange how things out of the New Testament come home to one sometimes with a quite new application? This morning I said several times, 'Insomuch as I am doing it to the least of these, I am doing it to you.' For you do wish me to be good, don't you?"

Then came her record of his visit to her own house at Hampstead; and then of their excursion to his house in the country; and then of their days at the little Suffolk watering-place. During this period he had felt that he understood her. There was no apparent alienation to be explained away; but he came across one passage which struck him for this reason—that it showed how closely, in some particulars, her experiences had resembled his own.

"I can never," she wrote, "be sure of the continuity of my own mood. Generally I feel secure of a sense that I am right in belonging to you; and all through these days in London I have felt, night and morning, that could you only be always with me, my heart would have perfect peace. But now, at this quiet

little place by the sea, where nothing disturbs our intercourse, I have been troubled and shaken. I have been troubled to-day—but at this moment I am calm again. When you talk to me my misgivings go. They go when I think of all that you have sacrificed for me, and of all the high thoughts in me, which you have done your best to encourage. And yet—oh, Bobby—what a strange thing is the conscience! It often seems to me like the ghost of Hamlet's father, its voice coming now from one place, now from another quite opposite, as if it were urging on me two different sets of arguments. What a lot of books—scientific books—I have read about it, long before I thought that, for my own peace of mind, I should ever have to consider how far they were true. I believe, however, that I am really learning one thing which I had often heard before, but never realized; and that is not what conscience is, but what a woman is. A woman can appreciate reasoning as well as a man can; but it is not by reasoning that she sees her own way in

perplexity. I can reason, and say that I am breaking some ties which, if everybody broke, all society would be ruined. But then, again, comes an answer—an answer I learnt from you—that what we do depends upon what we are ; and that if all society were as true as you and I are, and if all couples loved as well, society would not be ruined, but would be saved. Again, I can say that I am making Paul miserable by giving to you what is due to him alone. But again comes the answer, that this misery is merely imaginary—merely the creation of some conventional formula ; for I am merely giving to you what to him is wholly valueless. So too I can apply to myself—and I have applied them as if I were flagellating myself—all those names such as ‘impure’ ‘degraded’ ‘faithless’ ‘shameless,’ and so on, which are always the first stones cast at women like me. But against names like these I hardly care to defend myself. I know them to be so inapplicable that they hardly cause me uneasiness. All they can do is to turn me away from argument, and drive

me back to my own consciousness of myself; and in spite of every argument this still remains the same, like a flame inside a lantern which no wind can agitate. And then I know with a woman's absolute certainty—with a certainty which I would die for—that my heart is not impure, that I am not shameless or degraded, that my one aspiration is not to be faithless, but to be faithful, and that in spite of the many selfishnesses which sully one's daily life, I long to consecrate my whole being to you. I feel, as I write this, as if I were being lifted off my feet by some wind of the spirit, and as if the voice of the spirit were inspiring me. What nonsense that would sound to any one else reading it; but to me it is full of meaning. Words—words! where are you? Come and help me. Make me intelligible. I don't know what to say. If a rose has blossomed I can see it. If an aloe has blossomed I can see it. Well—here's another thing I can see—I can see that under your influence, Bobby, I myself have blossomed. It's a fact. I know it to be one.



Why should I vex myself by insisting on it any farther? As for arguments, they must play at see-saw if they will. They will sometimes make me feel that there is nothing to be said for us; sometimes that there is nothing to be said against us. But whatever is proved, oh, you who have chosen me, and whom I have chosen, I know that I am devoted to you; and when I trust to my consciousness and my instincts, I feel that loving you was the first right thing I ever did, and that all hope and all elevation is contained in it."

From this he turned to her record of the subsequent days at Lichtenbourg, during which she had sometimes seemed to him to be so cruel a mystery.

"You are coming to-morrow," she had written on the night before his arrival. "I long for you; but my aunt is here, and I feel she is watching me, just as I felt about my mother-in-law. It is only a fancy, I know; but it constantly takes possession of me and tortures me. Oh, come, come quickly! And yet I hardly know whether I most long for



your coming or dread it. I can't write any more. Yes—come! I long for you.”

A day or two later she changed her form of expression. She no longer addressed him, but spoke of him in the third person. “My aunt,” she wrote, “gets on so well with him. If there were nothing to conceal, how happy we might all of us be together! Suppose he and I were nothing but friends, mere affectionate friends, I should not feel the perverse shrinking from him that I experience now sometimes.”

Next day she continued, “What nonsense I wrote yesterday! If he were merely a friend, he wouldn't be mine, and mine only; and that is what I want him to be. If I were merely one of his friends—even the most valued of them—would he, as he has done, have given his life to me? No—no, Bobby! I want your whole sole love—your complete self—and I want to give you mine. And yet—sometimes you make me hate you, because you have made me love you so. I wonder if you can guess at all that is going on within me—how sometimes my nerves are strained

and tortured! It is all for your sake, and because I can't be false to you."

Then, a little later, came her mention of the arrival of her husband. "I didn't know," she wrote, "how his presence would affect me. I had a fantastic fear that it might fill me with some horrible compunction—that I might see myself suddenly as a criminal. The result was quite different. To my surprise my self-reproaches were all set at rest. Paul seemed further from me when I was face to face with him, than he had seemed when he was away at Smyrna."

Next day she continued, "I have been rather uneasy. That Paul is a person capable of being wronged by any bestowal I may be pleased to make of my affections, I cannot believe—I cannot realize. All facts are against it. I know it is not the case. But this knowledge of mine is traversed and troubled by what I suppose is some inherited instinct, or some echoes of opinions and judgments which I have heard ever since my childhood; and these opinions and judgments

go hammering away in my mind, stupidly condemning me, and condemning me unheard. For hours together they sometimes make me unhappy ; but then when I turn from them to myself, whom they are condemning, I see how absurdly false they are—how they are condemning what they do not know. I attributed them just now to an inherited instinct. I have another inherited instinct, and it is of a much deeper kind. It is the instinct to pray. I don't say prayers in so many words, exactly. I can't use the phrases of ecclesiastical Christianity, for I am not living according to its laws ; but I kneel down for a minute or two, each night and morning, and, with an odd inconsistency, I cross myself. I do it as a sign that I long for and love goodness—that I want my soul to grow upwards. How many good people would say that for a woman in my situation this must be hypocrisy ! But it is not. I can say no more than that. It is not."

Then came a day or two with entries like the following.

“Paul has taken to eying me in a possessive manner. I know the reason. He wants to make me feel that I am his absolute property, and to let others see that I am. He even seems to think that he has some property in my affection, and that at any moment he can call on me to exhibit this, so as to let him see, or let others see, that I am still keeping it for him. Oh, fool, fool! What does he think a woman is made of? Is a wife a husband's plaything? Has she no life of her own? If I gave way to my own natural impulses, how I should burn with indignation and rebellion! But I want to restrain myself. For the sake of that love of which I long to make myself worthy, I will be humble to Paul, and patient with him. I will fetch and carry for him. I will not lose my temper. I will go with him to these odious races.

“Bobby—I do all this, I leave you, I seem to neglect you, really because I am so devoted to you. Will you understand? I don't think you do. And how should you? I am so perverse. When I meet you just now, it is

impossible for me to say much to you ; and I feel angry for that very reason, and vent my anger on you.

“Last night you were cold and distant. I was, I know ; but I didn’t want you to be. If you could only have a little more penetration, you would see that when in speaking to you I have seemed most hard and odious, I have really been longing to cling to you, and tell you I was your own.”

Presently came this passage, which, as Grenville read it, sent the blood to his cheeks.

“I have driven you away ; I have told you to go. I couldn’t help it. I should have gone mad if you had stayed—at least I thought so. And now you are gone. Till I see you again I can write no more diary. Already I want you back.”

Then followed this, written during his visit to the Pasha.

“I said I would write no more till I saw you, till I had you with me again. But I must write. I must ease my mind somehow. When are you coming back ? Everything is

blank without you. Paul is rather poorly. I have been nursing him as much as he would let me. That at all events was a duty. But he would let me do little. He preferred the company of—what shall I call her?—my rival—one of my twenty rivals: and most of my time I am alone. Oh, Bobby—what can I do without you? You will come back soon, won't you? I don't know how to write to you."

Next day she wrote, "The children are both ill, as well as Paul; so I could hardly see you now, dear, even if you were here. All day I have been by their little beds; but all through my care my heart is aching for want of you. I believe you will come soon; for cruelly as I must seem to have treated you, I believe in you so entirely. I am weary in body, and sick in mind. Come to me."

Having studied these passages, and others relating to the same period, Grenville felt that his principal right to the secrets of the volume was gone. All of her conduct that had pained and troubled him was explained. He had felt, whilst reading her account even



of this, as if he were treading on sacred ground; and he shrank from prying into these earlier parts which referred to the period before his perplexities had begun. Her whole life lay before him defenceless upon the pages, which she had put into his hands so guilelessly. But still, that he might not seem to be undervaluing her confidence, or missing anything which she might really wish him to know, there was no part which finally he did not glance at; whilst one passage—it caught his eye and he lingered over it—dwelt in his mind, deepening the meaning of the whole.

“The more I think of it, the more terrible does marriage, as conventionally regarded, seem to me for some women. I see this at times with such a ghastly clearness, that I wonder at its escaping any one. For the women I am thinking of, there ought to be a new marriage service written; and the words of it, which need be very few, should say what it really means for them. So far as all their highest sympathies are concerned, and all their capacities for affection other than that



which is maternal, their marriage service might be comprised in Christ's curse on the fig-tree—'Let no fruit henceforward grow on thee for ever!' And of many such women it indeed might be truly said, 'How soon is the fig-tree, which was cursed, withered away!'"

He was closing the volume, intending next day to return it to her, when he noticed something more scribbled on the fly-leaf. The writing was in pencil, and very faint. It was written in haste evidently, as if under some sudden impulse. With a little trouble he deciphered it.

"Let my thoughts mix with yours, till they are like a single tissue of interlacing nerves, quivering with a single and yet a two-fold consciousness—only divided so far that we each may know ourselves united.

"I am not an angel—I am a woman—with a woman's passions, with a woman's weakness, and with a woman's strength—and all these are yours. Every corpuscle of my blood is yours, to throb for your sake, or to be shed for it.

“Sometimes troubles, sometimes temper, may have clouded my feeling for you; but I have loved you all the same. The rich miser, when he thinks that he does not care for money, is like me when I have thought that I did not care for you.”

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

GRENVILLE finished his reading on the night of their arrival at Vicenza. They had travelled leisurely, stopping three times on the road ; and each night before he composed himself to sleep, he had studied her pages by the light of two opaque hotel candles.

Every doubt with regard to her that had ever troubled him was now not only dispelled, but had given place to a confidence even deeper than anything he had known before. Faith was lost in vision. As he put the volume down, he was lying in a great gaunt bed, above which was an ultramarine ceiling. The walls of the room were festooned with flowers in rough distemper ; the floor was tiled, and dingy from want of washing. Musty

smells, like ghosts, haunted the curtains. But as he closed his eyes the whole place was like paradise. He was here in that very town where he had renounced one hope, and he was to awake to the realization of another, for which, almost unconsciously, that renunciation had been made.

They were staying at different hotels. In the morning he went to hers. Sunshine and happiness impregnated all the air. Her breakfast-table was bright with flowers, which she had just bought herself from some brown girls on the pavement. To her Vicenza was a world of wonders. It was a dream come true. They wandered through the streets; they explored the old-world palaces. Love was the warp of life for her, and these new experiences were the woof, and together they produced a surface prismatic with shifting colour. Long excursions were made by them, from which they returned by moonlight. The voices of singing peasants melted into the warm air. Grenville thought of the villa which, on a damp, well-remembered morning, he had visited

alone. He learnt by accident that it was to be let for a certain period. They went together and saw it. Both for a moment forgot that they were not yet married, and almost in the same breath proposed taking it till the autumn. They smiled presently at their forgetfulness. At a little distance there was a small white house, on whose red tiles the air could be seen shimmering. It was evidently unoccupied. Grenville spoke to the servant who was in attendance on them; and then turning to Mrs. Schilizzi, said—

“I have solved the difficulty. That shall be my home. You and the children shall be here.”

The project was carried out, like the fulfilment of yet another dream. No situation could have suited the children better. The air was fresh for them even during the heat of summer, and the Alps in the background sharpened their spears of snow. The halls of the villa, with their gorgeous hollow ceilings, and walls over every inch of which the brush of Paul Veronese had left its wake of colour,

were tenanted by perpetual coolness ; and seen through a vista of pillars and arched doorways, Neptunes and Tritons, grouped against a garden wall, were pouring out fans of water, whose outlines dissolved in spray.

The life which the little party led in this enchanted abode was simplicity itself. Their dishes and their wines were all redolent of the country ; and excepting for the absence of one national flavour, and for a care and cleanliness in the cooking, were such as would have been grateful and familiar to any Italian farmer. Grenville, who was a good linguist, became easily acquainted with the peasantry ; and Mrs. Schilizzi was soon active amongst them in many a work of kindness. Grenville, to his great delight, was again made conscious of this—that she was as sensitive to the sight of suffering as she was to the sight of beauty, and that compassion as well as passion could hang in shadow under her eyelashes. Within-doors they resumed their former studies and discussions, whilst he began himself to take part in the education of the children. The

only shadow on their lives—and indeed it was not menacing—was the fact that he, although no longer an invalid, had but partly recovered the strength which he had lost so suddenly by his illness. This had, however, one important result on his conduct. It compelled him, whatever might have been his own inclinations in the matter, to definitely give up, for the present at all events, all prospects of that career which had promised to be so useful and so brilliant. But as the weeks went on, he and Mrs. Schilizzi both began to feel a need for him, not indeed of a career, which is action regarded as throwing lustre on the actor, but of action regarded as a duty—as a debt owing to others.

“I think,” he said one day to her, “that there must be a mass of facts, and also a few suggestions, relative to the work at Constantinople, which I could put into a clearer form than they are likely to be in at present, and so smooth the way for X——, who will take my place. I will write to Downing Street, and propose that I do this here.”



“And me,” she said—“you must let me help you—unless perhaps I should be a hindrance.”

“You shall help me,” he answered; “but you will find it hard, dry work.”

“For that very reason,” she exclaimed, earnestly, “I shall like it all the better. Do you remember that sense we both had of a debt owing to Paul? I believe now that it was a debt not so much owing to him, as to something represented by him, to which I can give no name; and that same something is represented now for us by the world—by the children first, and by every one we can benefit afterwards.”

“You remind me,” said Grenville, “of what our friend the doctor said to me during that journey on which I first met your husband. You say that the something to which we owe ourselves is a something to which you can give no name. The doctor said—I remember his very words—‘In the present state of our knowledge, religion cannot express itself in any definite form which knowledge will allow

us to tolerate.' And then, Irma, he went on, 'All the same I maintain that man is only human because of his longing for what is more than human.' You and I have this longing in common, and we must try to satisfy it not by love alone, but by work."

"I like this," she said, when the documents for which he wrote had arrived from Downing Street, and after several weeks of diligence she had helped him in bringing his dry labour to a completion.

"Here," he said, "is a letter I have had from the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Read it, and you will see that our efforts have not been vain."

It was, however, well that they had not been longer or harder; for it was evident that for the present he could bear no farther strain. "You must now," she said to him, "rest yourself by a change of duty. You must go on educating me, and I shall help you better afterwards."

An eminent doctor, who had come to see him from Venice, like Mrs. Schilizzi, also

prescribed rest, by which he explained himself to mean change of air and scene, and the excitement of any interest involving no mental exertion. Their tenancy of the villa was by this time nearly expired; and they removed shortly to a beautiful spot on the lake of Como, spending their lives together, though lodging under different roofs. Having remained here for some time, they proceeded south to Siena, doing most of the journey not by rail, but by road, in two old-fashioned travelling carriages, which they were able to buy at Milan.

Grenville knew Italy fairly well. Its general aspect, at all events, could not be said to be new to him; but in Mrs. Schilizzi's company everything was a fresh surprise. Everything seemed to be yielding to him some unexpected incredible music, like an instrument touched suddenly by the hands of some inspired master. The golden and purple pencillings of light and shade on the mountains had a colour and keenness he had never known before. The pilgrimage chapels, shining

high on their rocky perches, stirred his mind and hers like the mysterious smell of incense ; the heart of the twilights deepened like purple flowers unfolding ; and all the passion and romance of the storied ages seemed to be floating on the transfigured waters of Como. Siena even more than Vicenza astonished Mrs. Schilizzi, with its mellow girdle of walls, and its narrow climbing streets, where the shops lurked under the shadow of arches brown with history. Day by day they took long drives into the country—that country of hills and valleys, which is bounded by the undulating curves of far-off lilac-coloured mountains. They visited strange walled villages, where the towers of ruined castles stood like hollow trees, with ivy on their broken outlines. They climbed the hills crowned by the towers of San Gimignano. They found their way to villas built by Cardinals of the Renaissance, which hid their fountains and statues in forests of dark-green ilex. Constantly too they would betake themselves to the great Sienese cathedral, moving softly over its pave-

ments of pictured marble, breathing an atmosphere which was charged with prayer and silence, and in which marble at the spell of prayer seemed everywhere to have flowered into life. Mrs. Schilizzi, actuated by some impulse which she could not analyze, would often seat herself on one of the countless chairs, and then sink upon her knees. "In that cathedral, I feel," she said once to Grenville, "as if all human emotions were passing through it, on the way to heaven." One thing that struck both of them was this—that the children, who often begged to be taken there with them, seemed to be sensible of some kindred feeling.

Thus occupied, the days and the months wore on. Autumn gradually died into early winter; and at last the time arrived when, considering all the circumstances, it appeared to both of them that, without indecorum, they might be married. The ceremony was performed at Nice, where they went and settled themselves for the purpose; and meanwhile they had bought, for a sum absurdly small, a villa above the Mediterranean, situated on

a well-known promontory, where land has come since to be sold by the square yard, but where then there was complete seclusion, and where a foreign purchaser was a wonder. Compared with the villa of which they had been tenants in the summer, their present abode was humble and even rude; but the paintings on some of the ceilings were not devoid of beauty; the rooms were well-proportioned; and by the time it was ready to receive its new possessors, though the stucco outside was scaling off the walls with age, the interior had an air of refined and even dignified luxury. The children and the nurses had been sent there a few days before them; so they felt that the place had become a home already, when they started for it from Nice, the moment the marriage was completed. On the Nice platform, as they were waiting for the arrival of their train, Grenville heard his name pronounced in a sonorous voice; and he suddenly saw before him the face of Sir Septimus Wilkinson, shining and swelling with the wish to be intimate and congratu-



latory. At a little distance was his daughter, whom also Grenville recognized.

“How are you!” exclaimed Sir Septimus, seizing Grenville’s hand. “My daughter and I were saying we were sure it was you. We of course had heard of your engagement, but we weren’t aware you were married. I was telling my daughter that that must be Lady Evelyn. God bless my soul, I was saying—What are the French mademoiselles compared with the young ladies of our own English nobility?”

“Allow me,” said Grenville with ready presence of mind, “allow me to introduce you to my wife. But I fear you have been misinformed as to one point. Mrs. Grenville’s nobility is Hungarian rather than English.”

Sir Septimus felt that his mistake had been corrected with great delicacy; and susceptible as he was to the claims of female beauty, and full of a belief in Grenville as a man who would do well for himself, he left the bride and bridegroom, for whose start he obsequiously waited, believing the bride to be the heiress



of some great continental magnate, who had only dropped her title out of deference to English prejudice. Grenville shrewdly guessed what was passing in the good man's mind; and the thought of the lot in life which the world expected of him, deepened his sense of the value of that other lot which he had chosen.

It is never safe to say of a man, before his death, that he was happy. In certain cases it is safe to say so after it. Not many months later it might have safely been said of Grenville, who even now, though he did not know it, carried the seeds of death in him. Never, since the illness from which he had suffered at Lichtenbourg, had he been what he was previously. His full strength never had returned to him. An attack of the same kind, due to some miniature imprudence, laid prostrate for the second time a constitution already weakened; and by gradual stages, as day sinks into night, his life sank through a painless twilight into death. Meanwhile, however, time had been given

him for realizing the fullness and depth of the existence he was so soon to leave. He often, without fear of wearying her by repetition, applied to his acquaintance with her what Keats said of his first knowledge of Homer—

“ So felt I as some watcher of the skies,  
When some new planet swims into his ken.”

And she knew—for the whole course of his conduct showed it—that he was speaking without exaggeration. Her feelings were no less deep than his ; though the full expression of them in words came only after his ears were deaf. During his illness and weakness she nursed him with most unceasing care. “ The more I can do for you,” she said, “ the more devoted I am to you.” But that he was actually going to leave her she never realized, and indeed hardly feared, till one afternoon, in the earnestness with which he spoke to her, she felt a sudden foreshadowing of it.

“ As I lie here helpless,” he said, “ I think of many things which had sunk out of sight

beneath the surface of my happy life with you—a surface which has reflected heaven. They have been coming to the surface again, as I believe drowned bodies do. Don't start, Irma: I am going to say nothing painful. Let me tell you," he went on slowly. "Perhaps, dear, I may never have another opportunity. The most wretched state in which a human creature can be is that in which it condemns what it is resolved to continue doing—especially when this seems the one best thing in life. You and I have both of us escaped that state, by refusing to accept the condemnation with which the letter of the law would have crushed us, and appealing to the spirit, by which the letter is slowly changed, and which has acquitted us. But lately, those old prejudices which we imbibed with our mother's milk, and on which all our affections, all our most sacred feelings, have been raised up, and trained like vines on trellis-work—those old prejudices have been coming back to me; and against my reason, against my inmost conscience, they have been

trying to betray my peace and fortitude with a kiss. They have tried to ulcerate my memories with the poison of imputed wickedness. But they have not succeeded. I want to tell you that they have not, in case that ever hereafter you should go through the same trial. I have a claim now," he went on, smiling, "to speak with authority on the matter which I never had before."

She looked at him speechless, full of appealing fear. He could not endure the sight of such piteous suffering. He forced a laugh, and spoke trying to reassure her.

"I only mean," he said, "that when one is ill, a kind of clairvoyance comes to one, so I thought I might as well speak to you whilst the prophet's vision possessed me. By the way, Irma, there is another thing I have been thinking about—the children, and how to educate them. Do you remember them in the cathedral at Siena? I often think of them there, and of the way in which the prayers and the music touched them. How can we teach them except in terms of the religion by

which we were taught ourselves? It seems hard to tell them things which to us are truths no longer; and yet these fictions are sponges still soaked with truth. Irma, you must settle what is best. I can speak no more; I am tired."

Later that day a doctor came to visit him. When the interview was over Grenville said to his wife, "I have had what to me is a piece of welcome news. To-morrow morning I want to go out early, and see the world at sunrise. If it is not chilly, and if I take proper precautions, the doctor tells me I may do so. I want to go to the beach, close by the grove of stone-pines. It is only a fancy of mine; but if you will come with me, perhaps you will understand it."

The spot he had indicated was just below the garden, and could be reached by a winding road, practicable for a light carriage. In the hush of the morning, when the light was a white dimness, a little pony-chaise stood at the villa door; and Grenville and his wife crawled in it down the steep descent, whose rough zigzags brought them close to the sea. In the uni-

versal stillness the noise even of that light carriage was startling. Every stone which the pony's hoofs loosed had been audible separately as it rattled down the hill. But on reaching the grove of pines, where the ground was soft and velvety, one sound alone came to their listening ears; and this was the long sigh and the falling murmur of the waves.

They stationed themselves on the margin of the grove, just where the sands bordered it. The air was fresh with the night which had hardly left it; and the darkness of the night was still in the solemn blueness of the sea. Before them for miles and miles were the curves of a vast bay, ending in a horn of mountains, which were now half lost in mist; and along the sea-line, and over the high hill-country inland, white houses were sprinkled on purple and gray shadow. But all as yet was sleeping. Even the waves fell like a dreamer moving on his pillow. Nothing was awake but smells of brine and dew.

"Let me taste the world," he said in a low voice to her. "Let me inhale the morning.



Ah—there is life—life, everywhere. Soon you will see it waking. Look, look!” he exclaimed, as an arrow of rosy gold shot through the air and struck on a crest of foam. And now a change came. Far away the mountains began to flush; coloured vapours steamed out of distant valleys; and wreaths of smoke from one place and another were seen rising in columns of shining silver.

She felt it difficult to speak. She could only look at him anxiously.

“Did you ever,” he asked her presently, “hear a story of Mirabeau—I dare say untrue, like most stories of death-beds—how he told them, as he was dying, to throw the windows open, and said, ‘Sprinkle me with rose-buds, crown me with flowers, that I may so enter on the eternal sleep’? I think that was rather theatrical; but still I can feel a meaning in it. I should like to be buried where flowers might sprinkle my grave—in our own garden; I once told you the place; and not in lead or wood, but in a wicker coffin which at once will give the earth to me.”



"Hush! hush!" she said. "Don't. Oh, Bobby, you frighten me."

"Don't be frightened," he answered. "Ah, there is life, life everywhere. And you are here, Irma, who are more than life. Irma," he went on presently, "I wonder if you will remember, dear, what I said to you yesterday about the children? Don't answer. You will—yes, I am sure you will. My thoughts wander a little. It's something else I must try to tell you now. I said, you remember, that as to our case of conscience, I could speak with an authority I never possessed before. What I meant was this. My convictions are now being put to the last test—the test of how they look to eyes that will soon be dying! I see things now from within, not from without, and I know that whatever may be said as to the rules or laws we have broken, we have been truer to their spirit in our breach of them than half the world is in their observance. Armed with that thought, I am afraid of one thing only—not of having loved you, but of leaving you. Don't cry,

dear, and don't look so scared at me. Our lot is one, now and hereafter also. I have done nothing for you that you would not have done for me; and it is for your sake I am dying. God!—love!—Irma!—I don't know how to express myself—I have been true to you."

"Bobby," she exclaimed, "what—what is the matter with you? Are you ill?—are you worse? Let us go to the house instantly. Lean back a little—you will breathe more easily."

Before the day was ended he breathed neither with ease nor difficulty.

One further sorrow, and one only, was reserved for her. This was her own parting from her children, whom she left to go to Grenville, and sleep by him under the same flowers. Meanwhile what her life owed to his, and what it could not lose even with his loss, may be gathered from the fact that after she was left alone—alone except for her children—her chief solace and most constant occupation when not teaching them, was

studying the papers and diaries in which his devotion to herself was recorded, and in comparing her own with them. Close to his resting-place in the garden was a pavilion overgrown with creepers. Here she would sit for hours, whilst the children were playing near her; and would re-read what he had written, repeating aloud his phrases. "Where shall I find him in all this boundless universe?" This was her constant question; and again and again in a vague way she answered it, by certain words of his, which she had written down the night he said them. "Think of the worlds forming, think of the worlds shining, and the darkened suns and systems mute in the night of time. To us, to us, what can it all say, more than the sea says to a rainbow in one tossed bubble of foam? And yet to me it seems that it says something. It asks, can it have no meaning for us, seeing that we are born of it? And can we be out of harmony with it, seeing that it speaks to us now?"

Gradually a plan shaped itself in her mind,

to which ultimately she gave effect. Piecing together her own diary to his, and using also letters and other papers, she formed the whole into something that resembled a coherent history ; to which, when she had finished it, she prefixed the following dedication—

“ TO THE SOLE AND ONLY BEGETTER OF THIS  
VOLUME.

“ You by whose side I shall lie, in a wicker coffin like yours, with whose bones my bones shall mingle, and whose flesh I shall meet again in the sap of the violets above our grave, I have done my best, whilst waiting to come back to you in death, to perpetuate in this book neither your life nor mine, but that one single life in which both our lives were fused. Were my power as a writer equal to my love as a woman, that life should live in these pages, as it lived and breathed once in our now lonely bodies. I would make it live—all of it ; I would keep back nothing ; for perfect love casts out shame. But if any

one should think that I ought to blush for what I have written, I should be proud if, in witness of my love for you, every page of it were as crimson as a rose."

THE END.

314

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